

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON JOSS WHEDON EXCLUSIVE

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the 10 characters you love to hate

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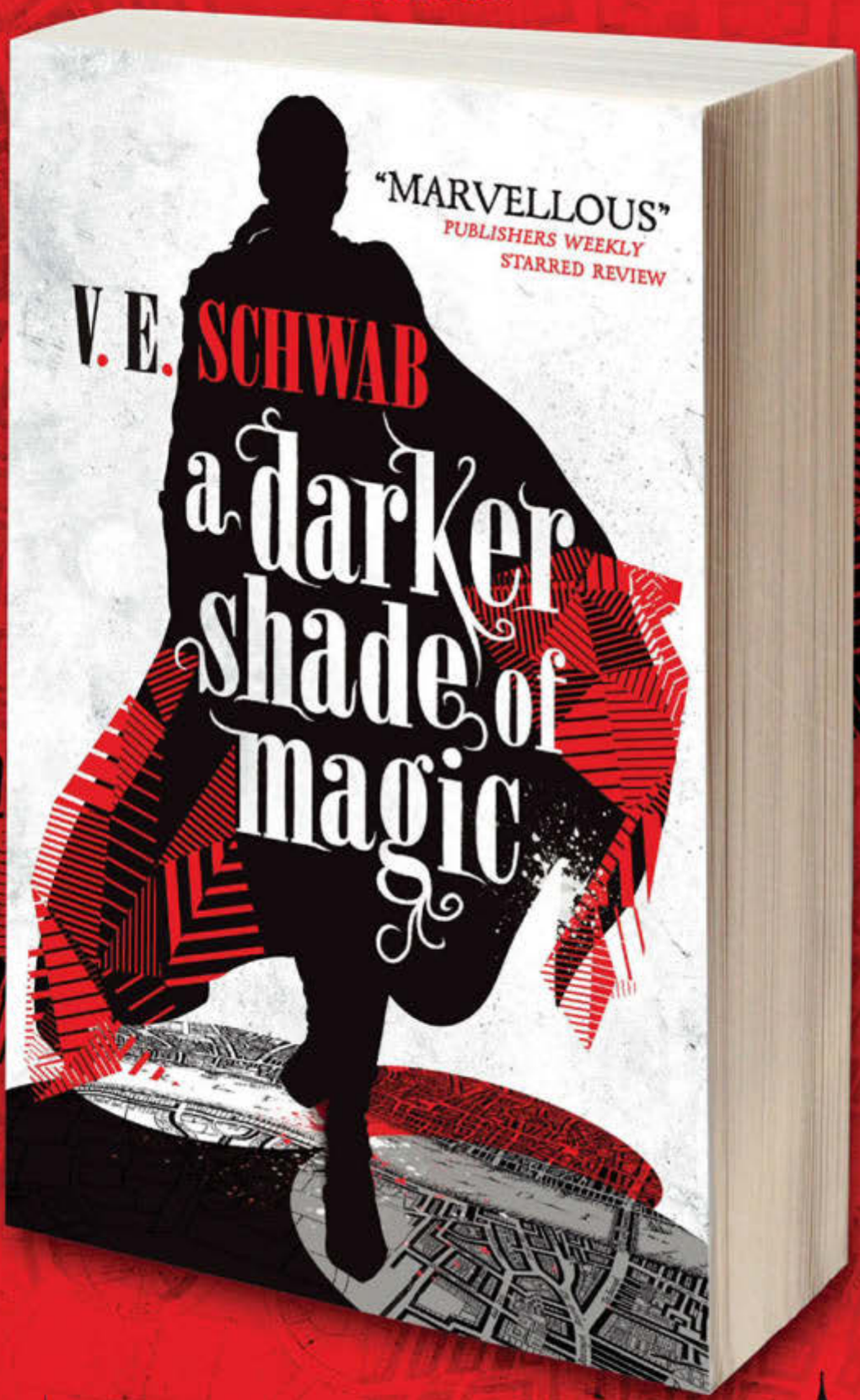
THE VOICES //
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THE IRON GIANT

How Vin Diesel's tin titan won your heart

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GET EXCITED ABOUT MINIONS

It seems that there's no escaping the real stars of *Despicable Me*, and indeed the yellow-hued servitude-seekers will shortly be the stars of their very own film. Taking the form of a prequel, Stuart, Kevin and Bob (all voiced by Pierre Coffin) will follow the lead of the brilliantly named Scarlet Overkill (Sandra Bullock). Also featuring the vocal talents of Jon Hamm, Michael Keaton, Allison Janney and Steve Coogan, this will be the movie you don't mind taking the kids to see.





Winter isn't coming; it has already arrived.

Stepping outside the warming confines of genre for a moment, the last decade of TV can rightly be looked back upon as a golden age, but there's a very real chance that it's coming to an end.

The last year has seen *Dexter*, *Breaking Bad*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *True Blood* and *The Newsroom* draw to a close, with *Mad Men* soon to follow – and let's not forget *Utopia* and *In The Flesh* being unfairly snuffed out before their time. Thankfully, we still have *Game Of Thrones* left to fly the flag for not only fantasy TV, but high-end storytelling in general.

With Season Five approaching, the Iron Throne rat race shows no sign of letting up. Players are entering and exiting the game at a rate of knots, and with the trailer promising the biggest departures from George RR Martin's books yet, you can be sure that no one is safe, and nothing is sacred.

It's a credit to the show's creators that even with some of television's most talented thesps on the way out, the collective ensemble is still one of the strongest seen in recent memory. You will be pleased to hear, therefore, that we managed to speak to said cast, the fruits of which you will discover in this very magazine.

Elsewhere, geek king Joss Whedon himself spills all on *Avengers: Age Of Ultron* – only the sequel to the third-highest grossing film of all time, no less – talking Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, The Vision and more.

Winter's here, but the cold never bothered us anyway…

Steve

Steve Wright
Deputy Editor

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MEET THE TEAM

Q. Which character will triumph in the Game of Thrones?



James Hoare
Editor in Chief
A. **Ser James**
An all-new character, the heir to House Hoare of the Iron Islands.



Steve Wright
Deputy Editor
A. **Daenerys**
She's got dragons and the Unsullied on her side – how can she fail?



Jonathan Hatfull
Senior Staff Writer
A. **Ser Pounce**
There's no way that little badass hasn't sat on the Iron Throne.



Poppy-Jay Palmer
Staff Writer
A. **Arya Stark**
After she kills everyone and starts her own nation of awesome.



Marcus Faint
Senior Designer
A. **Jaime Lannister**
Kingslayer turned King. Off with any heads that mock his lost hand.



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Steve

Steve Wright
Deputy editor







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NEWS

WEB OF RUMOURS

SPIDEY JOINS THE MCU

Spider-Man is finally a member of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and we couldn't be more excited... WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

In what is probably the biggest piece of Spidey-related news since Uncle Ben's death, Marvel Studios and Sony Pictures Entertainment have announced that they will join forces to induct Spider-Man into the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The news broke on the official Marvel website in February, where Chairperson and CEO of The Walt Disney Company Bob Iger said: "Spider-Man is one of Marvel's great characters, beloved around the world. We're thrilled to work with Sony Pictures to bring the web-slinger into the MCU, which opens up fantastic new opportunities for storytelling and franchise building."

Michael Lynton, Chairperson and CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment, said: "We always want to collaborate with the best and most successful filmmakers to grow our franchises and develop our characters. Marvel, Kevin Feige [president of Marvel Studios] and Amy [Pascal, former co-Chairperson of Sony Pictures Entertainment], who helped orchestrate this deal, are the perfect team to help produce the next chapter of *Spider-Man*. This is the right decision for the franchise, for our business, for Marvel, and for the fans."

Spider-Man is Sony Pictures' most successful franchise, with its five films taking a combined sum of over $4 billion worldwide, so it's obvious why they haven't given up the rights completely. But this new partnership could be the start of something wonderful. Not only will *Spider-Man* finally get the Marvel Studios treatment, it also opens up countless opportunities to incorporate Spidey into current MCU storylines.

Rumours have already started forming, with some fans believing that Spider-Man could be making his MCU debut in *Captain America: Civil War* ahead of his own solo movie franchise, planned to start in 2017.

"I am thrilled to team with Sony Pictures along with Amy Pascal to produce the next *Spider-Man* movie," Feige stated on the Marvel website. "Amy has been deeply involved in the realisation on film of one of the world's most beloved characters. Marvel's involvement will hopefully deliver the creative continuity and authenticity that fans demand from the MCU. I am equally excited for the opportunity to have Spider-Man appear in the MCU, something which both we at Marvel, and fans alike, have been looking forward to for years."

Spider-Man's reboot also leaves room for a reimagining of the character. After two separate Peter Parker origin stories, who is to say that Marvel can't shake it up a bit? Dylan O'Brien (*The Maze Runner*) and Logan Lerman (*Noah*) have already been eyed up for the lead role. There have been other rumours that Parker might not only not be taking centre stage; he might not be appearing at all. This leaves room for fan-favourite Miles Morales.

After a lifetime of Marvel-based movies with non-white protagonists, it was big news for the company when the Chadwick Boseman-starring *Black Panther* was announced last year. But since Spider-Man's inclusion pushed its release back by a year, Morales could end up being Marvel's first black superhero lead. This could be the start of a trend where casting anyone but a white actor in a lead comic book role won't lead to controversy. It's 2015 after all.

The majority of those in favour of a Miles Morales story have singled out *Community*'s Donald Glover as their dream casting choice. Before Garfield had secured his role in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, fans campaigned to get Glover cast through the medium of memes, Facebook pages and making #Donald4Spiderman a trending topic on Twitter, the latter of which was also backed by Mr Marvel himself, Stan Lee. Best of all, Glover has actually said he's like to take the role.

"It would be cool for [Marvel Studios] to go with something different," he told *The Daily Beast*. "To be real, I'd be honoured to play it, but I just want to see the best choice. I'd love to see any young guy do something interesting – that goes for the director, Spider-Man, Mary Jane, etc. I just want interesting choices that make people question things. One of the reasons *The Dark Knight* worked is because people didn't think it was going to work. I'm excited, though. It will be nice to see what Marvel does using him, especially in *The Avengers* universe."



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What we know so far about Ryan Reynolds' Merc With a Mouth

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The spooky trailer creeps in

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Lead actor David Anders on reinventing the zombie TV series

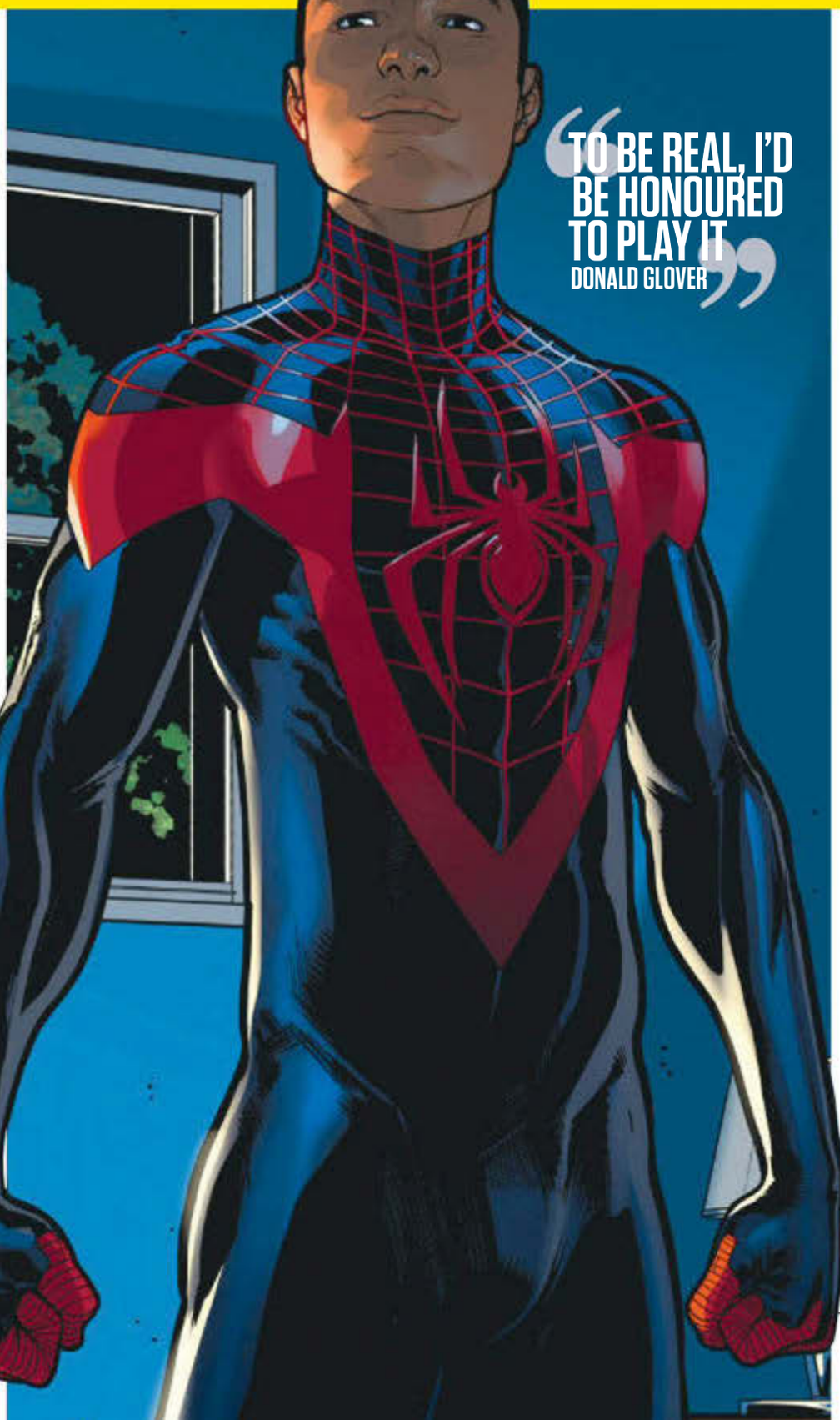


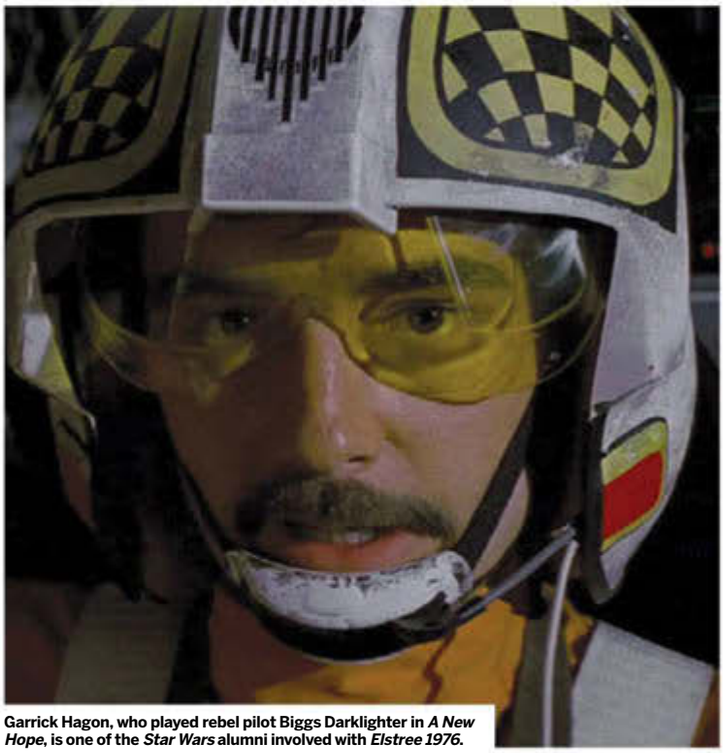


Tobey Maguire's Spidey was less science inventor and more, well, spider.



Andrew Garfield in his Spidey suit in Marc Webb's 2012 reboot.





Garrick Hagon, who played rebel pilot Biggs Darklighter in *A New Hope*, is one of the *Star Wars* alumni involved with *Elstree 1976*.

STAR WARS: BEHIND THE SCENES

Documentary Elstree 1976 will look at the career of some of the saga's most colourful characters

WORDS **OLIVER PFEIFFER**

Paul Blake, John Chapman, Anthony Forrest, Derek Lyons, Pam Rose… these names might not mean much to some, but probe deeper and you will realise that these people all played a part in one of the biggest sci-fi sagas of all time. That's what filmmaker Jon Spira has done for his documentary *Elstree 1976*, which focuses on the clutch of characters behind those masks and helmets in *Star Wars: A New Hope* and their subsequent convention-signing career.

"These are wonderful people – truly interesting people who have led these lives on the fringes of pop culture and share this common element that their fairly brief involvement with one film in north London in 1976 has gone on to shape their lives even four decades later," explains Spira.

The idea came to the filmmaker when he met background artist John Chapman, who signed up to a screenwriting class he was teaching. "He revealed this whole secret life he had where he'd been an extra in *Star Wars,* and was now travelling all over Europe as a guest at conventions, signing autographs," he continues. "So I went to a lot of conventions, and discovered this whole community of actors and extras, all of whom had been in *Star Wars*, but had their faces obscured by masks or helmets."

Among the ten personalities interviewed are better-known names such as David Prowse (Darth Vader), Jeremy Bulloch (Boba Fett) and Garrick Hagon (Biggs), who all consider their unique place in pop culture and the incredible fanboy fixation their characters have attracted.

"I'm just so fascinated by the obsession people develop with entertainment," finishes Spira, "and how something like *Star Wars* becomes so important to people that they start to define themselves by it."



Elstree 1976 is anticipated for release in November 2015.

SYFY'S MOST EXPANSIVE PROJECT YET?

Thomas Jane's TV comeback is a tale of intergalactic detective work

WORDS **MARK WHITE** INTERVIEWS **STEVE NASH**

It's sort of like a futuristic Forties New York, if that makes sense," explains Thomas Jane, describing the feel of new Syfy drama, *The Expanse*. "Future noir," he coins. "You guys should all write that down."

The Expanse is Jane's first TV role since playing history teacher/prostitute Ray Drecker in HBO's *Hung*. In a colonised galaxy two centuries in the future, intergalactic detective Josephus Miller takes on a case to find a missing heiress, alongside Jim Holden (Steven Strait), a Captain Kirk-style character and officer on an ice freighter. Together, the pair of them delve into a mystery that looks set to tear three civilisations apart: extremely different from *Hung*, but *The Expanse* has a cinematic grandiosity that the title might suggest.

"You know, I just try to go where I find the material that turns me on," says Jane. "And it doesn't really matter, especially now, whether it's television or whatever, we shoot it all on the same cameras. Whereas a feature film is more like a short story, a television show can be more like a novel."

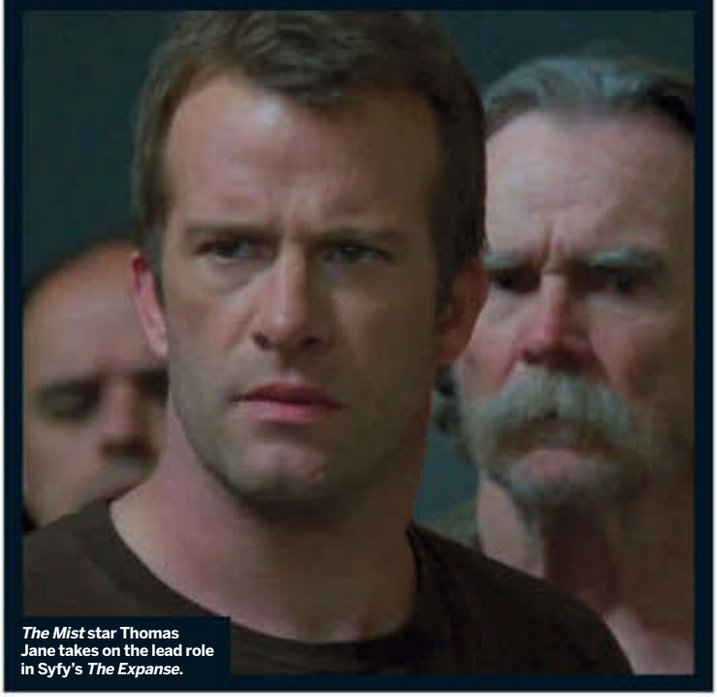
The comparison to literature is an apt one. *The Expanse* has been developed from the James SA Corey novels, so naturally the show has been touted as possibly sci-fi's answer to *Game Of Thrones*.

"The original writers aren't so worried if we play with the Lego blocks of the original story and move things around," says the show's producer Mark Fergus, "But generally I'd say it's a really faithful adaptation."

What's even more exciting for fans of the novels is that author Corey is part of the writing room. Two mediums are intertwining: "And that's why I'm here: because great writing turns me on," says Jane. "It's an ambitious project in more ways than one."



The Expanse will air on Syfy in the US later this year, with a UK release to follow.



The Mist star Thomas Jane takes on the lead role in Syfy's *The Expanse*.

FIVE THINGS WITH AMANDA SCHULL

The star of Syfy's 12 Monkeys tells us why this goes beyond the film.

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

1 By the fans, for the fans

Terry Gilliam's 1995 time-travelling sci-fi classic *12 Monkeys* is beloved by genre fans, so there was some understandable upset when it was announced that Syfy would be turning the film into a TV show. However, star Amanda Schull tells us that this isn't a simple cash-in. "We call it a reimagining of the film, because it's not the film," she explains. "The film was fantastic, and every single person associated with the series is a big fan. We don't want to try to redo it, and we don't want to try to change it. We all have such respect for it."

2 The road not taken

Instead of taking the story of the film and stretching it over an entire season, Schull tells us that *12 Monkeys* will be using the movie as a springboard rather than a blueprint. "I'd say probably the first episode has the most similarities. It's basically the entire film in one 42-minute episode, and then we very quickly detour and are able to spin off into so many different storylines, plots, ideas and characters that in a film you just don't have time for. You're just immediately on this train with these characters and what they need to do. Then it doesn't even take a breath."

3 Past lives

Although this *12 Monkeys* is a different beast, you can't forget that these roles had been inhabited before by the likes of Bruce Willis, Brad Pitt and Madeleine Stowe, and Schull tells us that nerves were inevitable. "It'd be ridiculous if I weren't, and I think that would be a very egotistical response if I weren't," she laughs. "'No, I think I can just nail it!' It's daunting, because Madeline Stowe is just incredible, and I don't want people to think that I'm trying to compare myself to her or that I'm trying to mimic her, because I'm not. They've made enough changes with the character that I don't feel that I am mimicking her."

4 Adventures in time and space

12 Monkeys represents the first major excursion into sci-fi for Schull, and she tells us that it's been the perfect jumping-off point. "Very much so," she enthuses. "Sometimes as an actor you have to spend a lot of time imagining a world that's so completely different from your own. And this is not that completely different, these circumstances and these possibilities… with the exception of time travel! [laughs] It's really exciting as an actor to be able to live in the same character's skin in different time periods and different iterations. It's something I've never done before, it's really thrilling."

5 Finding a fan base

12 Monkeys aired to a rapturous reception in the US, and has become one of the most highly buzzed new shows of the season. Schull tells us that she couldn't be happier that it's found its audience. "It has been a long time coming. We shot the pilot in 2013, so to be able to finally have people out there seeing it is really exciting," she explains. "There are some women in my ballet class in their 70s who came up to me and are just thrilled out of their minds with the show. I think so many people can connect with and enjoy it. So it's been really exciting that it has had that kind of reach."

12 Monkeys is airing on Friday nights at 10pm on Syfy.



"IT'S BASICALLY THE ENTIRE FILM IN ONE 42-MINUTE EPISODE"

STARK CHARM

THE PRINCESS-TO-BE DIARIES

The cast and crew on why Cinderella isn't your average fairy tale...

WORDS BARTOSZ CZARTORYSKI

After so many years of educating whole generations that true, requited love arrives unexpectedly, Cupid never misses with his arrows and a wedding on the first date is nothing out of the ordinary, Kenneth Branagh's live-action remake of Disney's classic 1950 animated feature *Cinderella* looks to have altered the course of the fairy tale tradition – and in the process even started making fun of itself a bit.

Starring the likes of Cate Blanchett, Helena Bonham Carter and Hayley Atwell, and with the presence of fairy tale staples like Prince Charming, the Fairy Godmother and the evil Step-Sisters, on the surface, this retelling looks like your standard fairy tale. However, appearances are deceptive.

Just as Giselle in *Enchanted* had second thoughts about her Prince Charming, *Frozen* openly ridiculed the very notion of love at first sight, *Brave*'s Merida challenged the Disney fairy tale princess stereotype and *Maleficent* turned things upside down completely by turning bad good, *Cinderella* is changing things. Having said that, some may see Branagh's brushed-up live-action version of the animated classic as a step back for Disney. But as countless fairy tales have taught us over the years, appearances are nothing if not deceptive.

"I, personally, don't find myself enslaved to the desperate desire for novelty. 'Is it any good?' is the question, not 'Is it new?'" says Branagh. "But people don't buy just nostalgia; they like certain things because they speak to them. You don't listen to a favourite song just once."

Stellan Skarsgård (*Thor: The Dark World*), who plays the Grand Duke, doesn't seem as keen on the penchant for updating classic fairy tales. "I hoped they won't be trying to modernise it, make it darker, brutal and grittier. Sometimes it's about exploring, making something purer and more nuanced rather than changing the costume. I see it as a step forward".

It seems like Skarsgård will be getting his wish, as *Cinderella* not only follows the exact same story as its 1950 predecessor; it also extends its intentional dependence on camerawork, settings and costumes. All of this combines to make the film a stunning visual experience.

All the trivia about the countless Swarovski crystals and miles of fabric that were spared for the lavish dresses was keenly given at the special travelling exhibition that is a part of an elaborate marketing campaign. Three-time Academy Award-winning costume designer Sandy Powell assures us that it's not just a gimmick, but the real thing, and a hell of a challenge, "The whole thing, from start to finish, from reading the script first of all, to the last day of filming, was about a year."

Lily James (*Downton Abbey*) represents a spot-on casting choice as Cinderella, being simultaneously strong while remaining as dazzling as your average Disney princess. Equally, however, she breaks the mould by not letting her Prince Charming (*Game Of Thrones'* Richard Madden) win her over without proving his worth first. And he isn't just a deus ex machina who turns up just to save the day (although you can sure that this will likely be part of his princely duties).

Nevertheless, far from being a default blank faced lady-killer – thanks in large part to Madden's committed and joyous performance and Chris Weitz's writing – Cinderella sees him as the quintessential (pop)cultural icon that often lacked substance. "He doesn't even have a name in the animation," says Madden. "I could build the character from scratch."

Also evident is a real magnetism between the two leads, which may explain why they were both chosen by Branagh to appear in his upcoming stage adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. "I loved acting with Richard, I really did," says James of her co-star. "He is a good man; incredibly supportive and very kind."

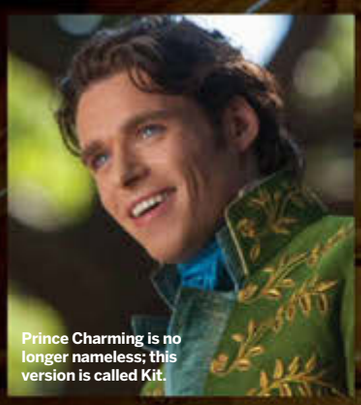
Branagh has definitely got it right: deep inside, the audience truly loves the songs it knows best, and doesn't really want its cherished childhood fairy tale to mutate, especially when, as Skarsgård puts it, "It's not about a girl who wants to become a princess, but about a good and honest person who just wants to live in love." You can't get more Disney than that.



Cinderella will be released in cinemas on 27 March.



Cate Blanchett stars as the Evil Stepmother.



Prince Charming is no longer nameless; this version is called Kit.

PRINCE CHARMLESS

3 films in which the dashing heir was anything but



SHREK 2 *(2004)*
The odious Prince Charming of the *Shrek*-verse is a preening, immoral dandy with mummy issues. Plus he wears glitter.

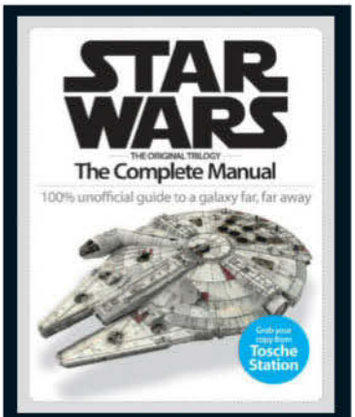


ENCHANTED *(2007)*
Prince Edward isn't a bad guy. He is insufferable and vain though, as well as unaware of how ridiculous he comes across.



FROZEN *(2013)*
"Oh Anna. If only there was someone out there who loved you." No words can do justice to how much of a complete and utter bastard Prince Hans is.





STAR WARS: THE COMPLETE MANUAL

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FANTASTIC FOREPLAY

Why Fantastic Four's first trailer was a pleasant surprise

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

Before production on the *Fantastic Four* reboot had even started there were things for the pernickety to worry about. Director Josh Trank's involvement started a wave of worry that the movie was going to be shot in a found-footage style, or at least have a found-footage feel about it (to be fair, that's mainly because Fox exec Emma Watts said it would).

Next, actor Toby Kebbell revealed in an interview with *Collider* that his character Doctor Doom – or Victor Domashev, as opposed to Victor Von Doom – is going to be an anti-social programmer. "And on blogging sites I'm 'Doom'," finished Kebbell, as a resigned 'blaaargh' echoed once more from the pernickety end of the fandom.

There was also a bit of a panic surrounding the fact that the movie's storyline was ever so slightly unconventional. What that really came down to was the movie's storyline was drawn from the *Ultimate Fantastic Four* comics rather than the classic series. A few of the *really* uptight fans (read: racists) were against the casting of Michael B Jordan as Johnny Storm because 'he isn't black in the comics!' Groot couldn't shoot fireflies out of his body in the comics, but y'all didn't have a problem with that.

After all that, and the memory of the mediocre 2005 *Fantastic Four* movie and its slightly better 2008 sequel *Rise Of The Silver Surfer*, the first trailer for Josh Trank's offering was actually pretty great. We got a good look at the Four, the tech, the super-suits and all that other cool stuff. It established a good tone: spacey, earthy, zero per cent cheesy and 100 per cent awesome.

The Fantastic Four will be released in cinemas on 6 August.







Miles Teller will star as Reed Richards, aka Mr Fantastic, in *The Fantastic Four*.



Ryan Reynolds' test footage was a big hit with fans.

MERC WITH A MOUTH

Who's playing who in the comic-book movie we've all been waiting for...

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

RYAN REYNOLDS AS WADE WILSON

Reynolds is no stranger to superhero movies. His *Deadpool* leading-man status makes sense after he played the Green Lantern and, you know, Deadpool in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. His *Deadpool* enthusiasm and history with the character and his spot-on snark make him a great fit for the Merc with a Mouth. His casting just *makes sense*. There are some who will say that he can't carry a movie, not after *Green Lantern*, but it's unfair to pin that hot mess on one man when it most definitely was not (just) his fault.

MORENA BACCARIN AS THE LEADING LADY

The shortlist for Reynolds' leading lady had been floating around for a while, including names like Taylor Schilling, Jessica de Gouw and Crystal Reed. We've now had confirmation that *Firefly* favourite Morena Baccarin has joined the project, but as to who she will be playing, we have no idea. But we reckon it would be fun if Baccarin portrayed Shiklah, aka Mrs Deadpool and Queen of the Undead. That would be one kick-ass movie wedding.

TJ MILLER AS THE COMIC RELIEF

Like with Baccarin, we don't actually know which character Miller is supposed to be playing. We know that he's going to be supplying the comic relief, be it in the form of a villain or a sidekick, but we're leaning more towards him portraying Deadpool's sidekick Jack Hammer/Weasel.

GINA CARANO AS ANGEL DUST

Gina Carano is one of the few casting choices not dusted in secrecy. The action star is set to play Angel Dust, one of the Chicago Morlocks. As a mutant with adrenaline-activated superhuman strength abilities, Angel Dust hid her fear of rejection under a heavy veil of badass.

NOT DANIEL CUDMORE

When it was announced that Piotr Rasputin, aka Colossus, would be making a comeback, we kind of assumed Daniel Cudmore would be taking up the reins once more after three X-Men appearances. Sadly, he is being sidelined to make way for a new actor.



Deadpool will be released in cinemas on 12 February 2016.

NAY-SAYER BUSTERS

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

Ghostbusters gets a huge re-imagining...

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

When rumours of a *Ghostbusters* reboot started surfacing, a lot of fans of the original started to come out to dust off their Proton Packs in interest, while others were wary of a childhood favourite getting the *Star Wars* prequel treatment. But the most vocal group were those who opposed to idea of the film being lead by a troupe of woman.

However, original Ghostbuster Dan Aykroyd has voiced his support, which is the only endorsement anyone needs. "I can tell you, as the originator, I'm very happy with what [director Paul Feig has] done," he told *Unmasked With Ron Bennington*. "It's very tasteful. And it needed a reworking. The thing needed a new engine.

"It's as if the first two movies don't exist, and this is a whole parallel reality where for the first time the Ghostbusters exist, and they're women in this environment that's a lot different that the first two."

The partnership of Feig and writer Katie Dippold proved to be a good one for *The Heat* – which scored favourable reviews with critics – and the amazing cast, which so far includes Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones, Katie McKinnon and Cecily Strong, certainly possesses the comedy credentials to produce gold.

The reboot has everything going for it, topped off by the fact that it's the *Ghostbusters*. But if the news of the reboot has genuinely ruined your childhood as many people claim, perhaps you need to think about what kind of childhood you actually had.

Ghostbusters 3 will be released in cinemas on 15 July 2016.



BUSTIN' MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD

Are you excited about the reboot?

28% NAY

72% YAY



"I HAVEN'T SEEN A SCRIPT... BUT I'M EXCITED TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS WITH IT"

WILLIAM FICHTNER

KOWABUNGA DUDE

SACKS IS BACK

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles big bad William Fichtner talks about returning for round two...

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

Seeing as the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* sequel was scheduled before the first one even hit the cinemas, we're guessing Paramount has had a grand scheme planned for a while. But all we know for sure right now is that William Fichtner will be returning as Shredder's henchman Eric Sacks. Beyond that, even Fichtner doesn't know what's going on. "I haven't seen a script or anything at this point, so I don't really know!" he says, "but I'm excited to see what happens with it.

"I'm really curious about it. There are more characters in the whole world of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles than we saw in the first film. But the guys that are writing the second script, Josh Appelbaum and André Nemec, they worked with us a little bit in the first movie. They're very good and imaginative, so I'm curious, you know. I'm curious what they are going to come up with."

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles didn't give Fichtner much opportunity to try out his martial arts, but maybe the sequel will be the start of something new.

"There were a lot of guys who worked on this film: stunt guys, special effects guys – there was a stunt team on this that would come out there and throw these martial arts moves, and I'm telling you, they would get a small crowd gather around and watch them when they were working. So I watch [my stunt] guy do that, and I'm like, 'that's absolutely wonderful, buddy! Let me go and get a cup of coffee. You are making me look so good right now!' I'm going to let the pros at that do it, and we're going to slide that into the film, and it's going to look like a million dollars!"



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2 will be released in cinemas on 3 June 2016.

CRIMSON PEEK

DEL TORO GOES FULL GOTHIC

Behind the shroud of Crimson Peak

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

Guillermo del Toro's to-do list is so extensive and under so much discussion that it's sometimes easy to forget that he actually makes films as well. While rumours about *Pacific Rim 2*, *Hellboy 3* and *Justice League Dark* raged online, the master filmmaker got on with making his Gothic horror tribute *Crimson Peak*.

With a star-studded cast and a list of inspirations that includes *The Haunting*, *The Innocents* and *The Shining*, *Crimson Peak* is a hugely exciting prospect, and we've finally had a good first look at the movie with a gorgeous poster and trailer. Now, Gothic and del Toro obviously go hand in hand, but it looks as though the director of *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Pacific Rim* has fully indulged his love of the genre. The film stars Mia Wasikowska (*Stoker*, *Alice In Wonderland*) as young author Edith Cushing, who goes to live with her new suitor, the charismatic Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) and his icy sister Lucille (Jessica Chastain) at their crumbling mansion after a family tragedy. But she soon discovers that the crumbling masonry isn't the only danger to her safety. "Ghosts are real," she whispers. "I know that now."

The bold and beautiful poster is a statement in itself, but let's go a little deeper as we assess just how Gothic *Crimson Peak* is going to get.



Mia Wasikowska gets seriously disturbed in *Crimson Peak*.

The HIDDLESTON KEY



1 Not remotely Gothic



2 Gothic potential



3 Pretty Gothic



4 Very Gothic indeed



5 Full Gothic



A young ingénue propositioned by a tall handsome man? Classic Gothic, but a bit more *Jane Eyre*.



This mansion is none more Gothic. Del Toro has said the rotting attic represents its broken inhabitants.



Just in case we hadn't picked up on his sinister intentions, Hiddleston executes a perfect smile-to-frown.



Our first proper look at the house itself. Crimson Peak is the classic Gothic mansion turned up to 11.



Lucille (Jessica Chastain) spies on her brother in an intimate moment. Creepy sibling relationships? Gothic.



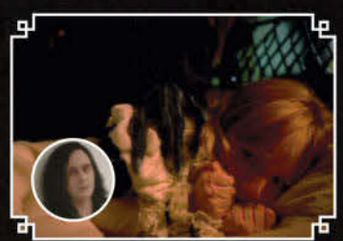
Charlie Hunnam appears as Dr Alan McMichael, an old friend of Edith's and romantic rival for Thomas.



The glimpses of the ghosts are heavily reminiscent of del Toro's classic horror *The Devil's Backbone*.

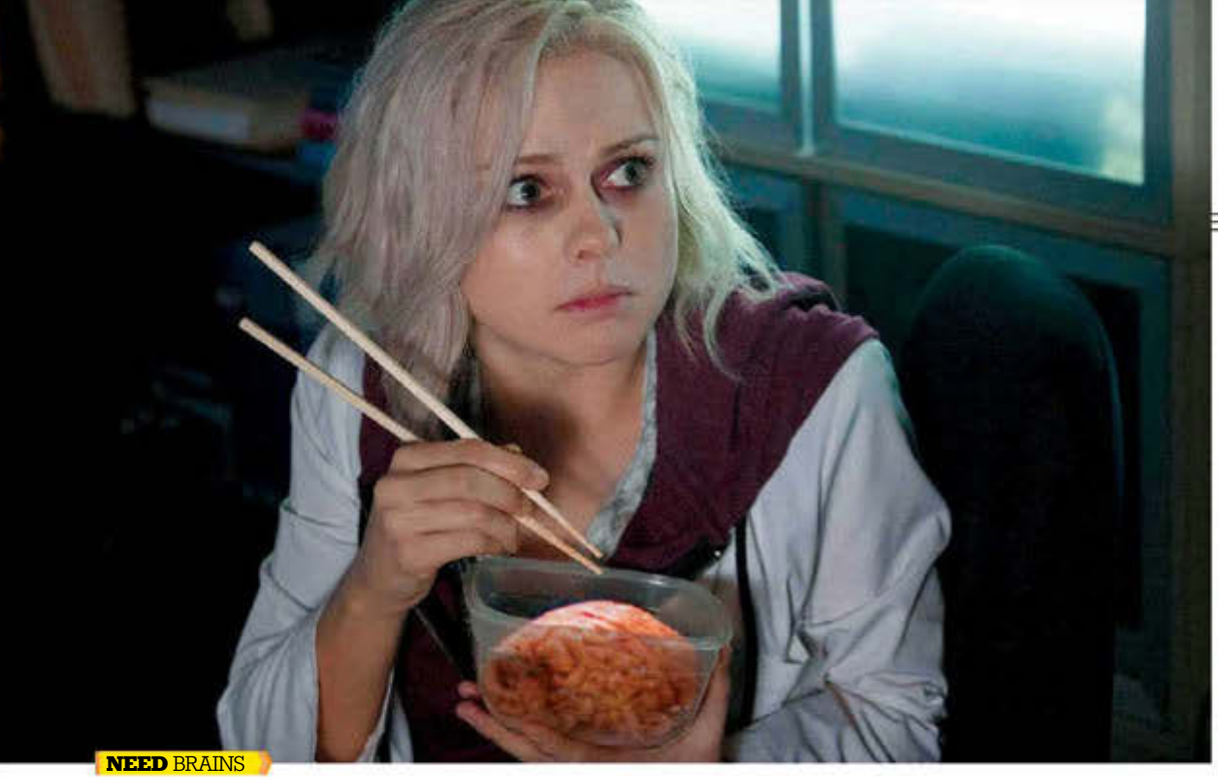


Edith insists that she has to leave while the siblings comfort/imprison her. We wouldn't trust that cuppa.



A ghostly hand appears, "Beware of Crimson Peak." The message comes through loud and clear.

Crimson Peak **will be released in cinemas in the UK on 16 October.**







NEED BRAINS

IZOMBIE, YOU BLAINE

Heroes star David Anders on playing a very different kind of comic-book lead

WORDS **MARK WHITE** INTERVIEW **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

In the difficult second season of *Heroes*, brain-stealing villain Sylar was incapacitated by a mystery power-disabling virus, with David Anders drafted in as a replacement. He played immortal warrior Adam Monroe, but though he had all the perfect baddie traits – smarmy, calculating, even brilliantly British – Monroe was killed off after just over a season.

After what seems like a lifetime later, it's Anders who's doing the brain-stealing, now. *iZombie* swaps the immortal for the undead, as medical student Olivia 'Liv' Moore (Rose McIver) wakes up from the party from hell to find that she's now part-zombie. With a craving for brains and her life turned upside down, Liv finds solace and survival using her medical knowledge in a job at a morgue. She soon finds out that she absorbs the memories of the brains she eats, and so Liv uses her skills to solve murders alongside a detective (Malcolm Goodwin). So where does David Anders fit in?

"My character Blaine is the main antagonist," explains Anders. "He becomes a zombie too: he's a drug dealer, but becomes a brain dealer. Only he has no moral dilemma like Liv has, being this new thing. He's embracing these new-found powers; there's lots of blood. There's lots of death." Another dark role then, David?

"It's a zom-com-rom-dram!" Anders laughs. "It's something I've done my entire career, play the heavy character. But this is different in that it's really funny, and I've never really done that. You know, there are certain episodes that lean more towards the drama and then certain episodes that are more comedic. I feel like there's enough of each emotion in each episode that it's a nice mix."

This blend of styles shouldn't come as a surprise. *iZombie* is loosely based on the DC comic of the same name, and has been adapted by Diane Ruggiero and Rob Thomas, creator of *Veronica Mars* and *90210*. Both shows threw a little humour into relatable teenage troubles, and *iZombie* seems to be along those lines. "He's a wise sage of human being: we're in good hands," Anders says of his showrunner; he hadn't read the original comics, but says he fell in love with Thomas's writing. "Every new script, we're all in a hurry to read it and see what we get to say next week."

Anders' enthusiasm for *iZombie* is certainly a good sign, then, for anyone who hasn't read the source material. The cast went over to San Diego Comic Con last year despite no one having seen the show, and it seems they already have a small following.

"It was a difficult thing, because it was all just hearsay and speculation at that point, but we had to pitch them this show." The response? "The feedback was entirely positive! The people who showed up to our panel had a great time and we got some love going. People are looking forward to it."

iZombie will air on 17 March on The CW in the US, with a UK air date to follow.



David Anders and Rose McIver in the first episode of *iZombie*.

FIENDS FOREVER

Which of these charming cadavers is your zombie bestie?

R (WARM BODIES)



Warm-hearted, doe-eyed brain-muncher R loves dead formats like vinyl records and Shakespearean definitions of romantic love.

FIDO (FIDO)



Every proud American should have a zombie helper, and they can be a young boy's best pal – provided their collar doesn't malfunction.

BILLY BUTCHERSON (HOCUS POCUS)



He may look like a nightmare, but pop open those stitches and Billy will always put bros before broomsticks.

ED (SHAUN OF THE DEAD)



Ed might be a biter and a shitty conversationalist, but he can still wipe the floor with you on *TimeSplitters 2*, and he does make a rather fetching addition to any garden shed.

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COSPLAY OF THE MONTH

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DEATHSTROKE

COSPLAYER: MARTIN J THOMAS **FROM:** LONDON, UK **PHOTO:** ACE ASHUN **TWITTER:** @DEATHSTROKEMJT

1 THE CHARACTER

I chose to cosplay Deathstroke mainly because he is my favourite character. In the DC Comics universe, and also in the *Arrow* TV show, Deathstroke is a former soldier, martial artist, weapons expert, master strategist and survivalist. Deathstroke is also an older-aged character too – not something you find all too often in comics and TV. In real life, I am a former soldier, and I am also a martial artist too. I'm 40 in the spring, so he seemed like the perfect choice. Plus, his costume is awesome!

2 THE COSTUME

The hardest thing for me was to get the mask and armour right! I'd seen a few non-impressive Deathstroke cosplay examples at various different conventions, and I just really wanted to do the character justice. Around 50 per cent of the costume I made myself using knowledge of and by researching military ballistic body armour and materials etc. The other 50 per cent (belts, ammo, etc) I bought online and then adapted, personalised and co-ordinated to my own tastes.

3 THE DESIGN

I wanted my Deathstroke to look real, and also be functional! A lot of other Deathstroke examples you can tell are painted cardboard and/or are painted rubber or foam costumes. My costume's body armour, for example, is made of Kevlar, and is real! It would stand up to a baseball bat, and is even stab-proof in places! Don't get me wrong, I'm not about to patrol the streets at night as a vigilante [laughs], I just wanted it to look as realistic and functional as possible.

4 THE WEAPONS

In the comics, Deathstroke uses a sword and a gun, and has additional things like grenades and flash-bangs – a bit like Batman's utility belt. For authenticity, I incorporated a blunt samurai sword replica, a martial arts training sword, a legal Airsoft BB gun, Airsoft BB gun Shotgun shell ammo and two fake replica .50 Calibre rounds. What makes the .50 Calibre rounds special is that one bullet has a green kryptonite tip with Superman's name on it, and the other has a led tip with Batman's name on it.

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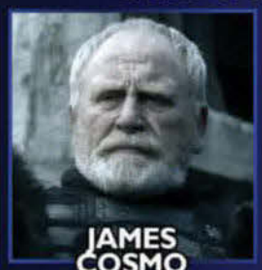
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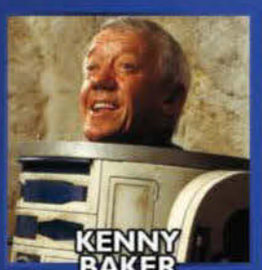
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THE HEAD *that wears* THE CROWN

GAME OF THRONES IS BIGGER THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN, BUT THE SHOW HAS TAUGHT US SOME HARSH LESSONS ABOUT POWER AND COMPLACENCY. WE TALK TO THE CAST ABOUT BEING NUMBER ONE AND WHY SEASON 5 WILL BE JUST AS UNPREDICTABLE AND DANGEROUS AS EVER...

WORDS **JONATHAN HATFULL**

THERE ARE VERY FEW TELEVISION SERIES THAT CAN STAND WITH GAME OF THRONES. IN TERMS OF SIZE, SCOPE, POPULARITY, AND RENOWN, THE HBO LEVIATHAN towers above the competition. *The Walking Dead* might offer gory shocks, *Doctor Who* might have fans covering their ears and shrieking for fear of spoilers, and The CW might have set up home in the geek-friendly forests of Tumblr, but when *Game Of Thrones* rolls out a teaser trailer, everyone clicks full screen and pays attention. When April comes around, there's only one show that everyone's talking about, and the cast are very much aware of it.

"It's sphincter-tightening," laughs Liam Cunningham, who plays Stannis Baratheon (Stephen Dillane)'s faithful right-hand man Davos Seaworth. "The popularity of the show, it focuses the mind a little bit. It's not some dodgy soap where you're just throwing out the lines and going home. I get daunted when I see the scenes that I have to do; I go, 'Oh Christ!' It's all about between action and cut. The rest is, as an actor,









What role will Sansa play in Littlefinger's machinations?

it's out of your hands, and you control the things that you can have control over. After that it's somebody else's problem. So you just try and do the best you can with what you're given."

"I was always very reluctant to admit *Thrones* had become this kind of phenomenon of a TV show," reveals Kit Harington, looking slightly more relaxed than his character, troubled Night's Watchman Jon Snow. "You can only ignore that fact for so long, but you can't take that onto set with you."

"I think it's a good idea if you can force yourself to forget about how big it is," adds John Bradley, who plays Jon's friend Samwell Tarly. "I think that would be a distraction. If I'm doing a scene with Kit, the example I always use is when we found out that people like Barack Obama watch the show. It's not going to help; it's going to be distracting to have that in your mind while you're trying to talk to Jon Snow. It's going to throw you a bit off-course if you say your line and you think, 'I wonder what Mr Obama thought about that.'"

While we can't say for sure what President Obama thought of Season Four – or indeed Snoop Dogg, who retweeted Carice van Houten (Melisandre) much to her delight – we can speak for ourselves and say that we were as impressed as everyone else with the way that showrunners David Benioff and DB Weiss managed to keep the momentum going.

Season Three built to the horrifically shocking 'The Rains Of Castamere', in which the Red Wedding left you either speechless or screaming. Somehow, Season Four raised the stakes and gave us the Purple Wedding, Tyrion (Peter Dinklage) putting an arrow in his father Tywin (Charles Dance), Sansa (Sophie Turner) and Littlefinger (Aiden Gillen) forming an alliance and Arya (Maisie Williams) going off to join the Faceless Men. Oh, and let's not forget Oberyn Martell (Pedro Pascal) being pummelled into a bloody mess by The Mountain (Hafthór Júlíus Björnsson) after a build-up of *Princess Bride* proportions. Resting on its laurels isn't something *Game Of Thrones* does. Every season provides the audience with new shocks, talking points and reasons to howl our surprise/outrage into social media.

> "THE SUCCESS OF THE SHOW IS SPHINCTER-TIGHTENING!"
> LIAM CUNNINGHAM

If you think the people working on the show take our rabid fandom for granted, you're wrong. Harington tells us that each year brings the same challenge to stun the audience, but Season Five means something special. "I worry every year about it running out of steam," he says. "I think we've got to a point where people who have watched it thus far will finish it. So I don't think it's going to lose its viewership, but it's about keeping that viewership happy and keeping the quality up and making sure we don't do what other – naming no names – TV shows have done in the past, which is finish on a whimper. Some of my favourite TV shows in history, the best season was five, and then they maintained it to the end, but the best season was five. This year's important to me, and all of us, for keeping that standard with some of our favourite TV shows."

"There's such fans of the books, and the fans of the show are just growing and growing and growing," adds Nathalie Emmanuel, who stands at Daenerys Targaryen's (Emilia Clarke) side as her advisor Missandei. "I think almost the responsibility of that, of pleasing the people that are keeping us going, that watch us, that's why we're on a fifth season."

That kind of fanatical fandom also extends to the cast, as several of them announce that Season Five is the first time that they're actively trying to avoid spoilers. Alfie Allen, who plays the ever-more-brutalised Theon Greyjoy (sorry, Reek), tells us that what began as an acting choice became a habit that benefited him as a viewer. "In the third season, I didn't read any of the scripts except my own stuff because I was just in a world where there was nothing – everything that was happening outside that room was irrelevant to me," he remembers. "Now it is quite funny, because I sit there with my friends and I'm like, 'What?' And they're like 'You're on the show, did you not know about this?' So I do like to keep myself as a fan and keep some things unknown to me."

"IT'S THE FIRST TIME THAT I HAVEN'T READ THE WHOLE THING," ADDS HARINGTON. "ALMOST LIKE ALFIE SAID, IT'S LIKE THE TESTER, I WANT TO SEE IT FIRST-HAND, I WANT TO SEE it as a fan. I consider myself a fan of the show, but actually I've never put that to the test as far as not knowing what's coming. So I've spent the whole year with fingers in my ears, because everyone's been having chats around the bar about what happens in their storylines, and I've to go, 'No no no no, don't tell me!' Like a normal fan of the show would. 'Argh spoilers, no!'"

One of the cast who happily admits to reading the entirety of Season Five is Bradley, who reveals that we can certainly expect our jaws to be dropping to the floor. "It's always amazing to read a script and think, 'Oh my god, we've got an unfilmable script here.' And then April rolls around and you think, 'Oh, well they must have filmed it.' But it is nice to read the words on the page. You can only imagine what all the heads of department are going to do to those words to bring them to life, I'm constantly surprised by how they achieve that. Because if you read some of the directions, they seem crazy and extreme, and almost too extravagant to bring into actuality." "They really were this year," adds Harington.

"So it seems they've got a real task on their hands, and then you remember that these are all people working on the very top of their game, and then they get their hands on it, and then in April you see what they've done, and it's always breathtaking," concludes Bradley.

Interestingly, prop master Robbie Boake tells us that from a production standpoint, the fears are pretty similar. "Every year has its own challenges," he explains. "Sometimes they appear to be absolutely insurmountable at times, and then you take a deep breath and say, 'You know what, we've done this before.' There is the comfort of having the experience and the track record of doing some very big things.

"So when something new arrives, and there always is something pretty big in the scripts, you go 'Woah, how are we doing that,' but there's nothing that can't be worked out, and that is the challenge on the show I think, is that we certainly push every year to do something bigger, better, faster, more interesting, and it's never rested. It's consistently got bigger and bigger and bigger."

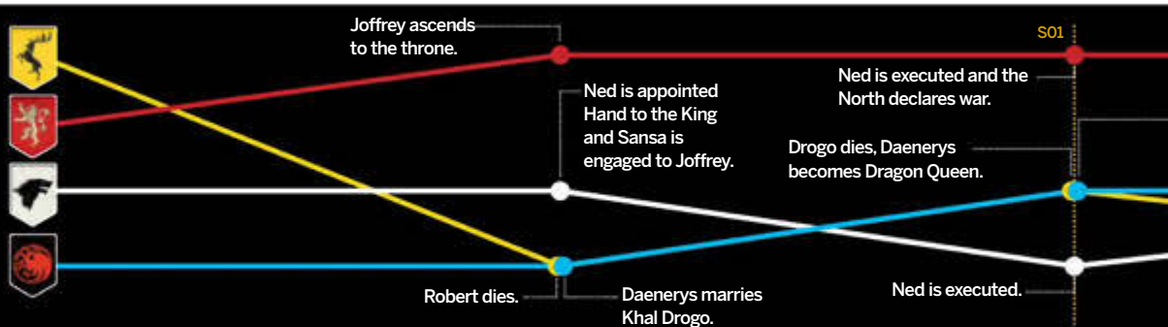


Season Five will hopefully find the budding romance between Missandei (Nathalie Emmanuel) and Grey Worm (Jacob Anderson) blossom further.

King's Landing Standings

How the Houses have fared over the course of four seasons

House Baratheon | House Lannister | House Stark | House Targaryen



Cunningham found himself pushed further north – at least as far as Westeros goes – this year, as Season Five begins with Stannis and his forces on the Wall, having rescued Jon Snow and the Night's Watch from the seemingly unstoppable attack of Mance Rayder (Ciarán Hinds) and his Wildlings, and he says he was so stunned by the work that went into creating the visuals that he refused to elaborate on beyond it being "close to the Wall!"

"Yeah, it's ridiculous," he marvels. "We didn't go to Iceland, but there is one area that they had to paint the landscape, and I think it took a month. They actually had to paint Northern Ireland, and it's just extraordinary."

"The crew work so hard, it's unbelievable," adds van Houten. "And when you walk on a set like that, you cannot believe what you see. It's as if it's been there forever, these sets. They look like castles that were there forever, it's unbelievable. When we come there in the morning it's already prepared, and I'm like, 'What time did they get up? 11 at night?'"

"They were up at 2am," confirms Cunningham.

The arrival of Stannis's forces at the Wall was one of those thrilling moments that only shows as rich and detailed as *Game Of Thrones* can manage; the excitement of seeing plotlines intertwining. Few shows can offer a scene as superficially simple as Brienne of Tarth (Gwendoline Christie) recognising Arya close to the Eerie and make it so heart-wrenching. "You're Arya Stark," said the warrior, a moment that meant little to the young girl, but so much to all of us who knew how far Brienne had come to find her, although we all knew it wouldn't work out. The look Melisandre gave Jon, however, hints at something much more important to come. "My character is trying throughout the fourth season to get everyone to go north, to go up the Wall," remembers van Houten. "And then we end, we go up the wall, and then we see her clocking Jon Snow, and all of us know that there is something about this guy... which is not revealed until later on!"

The question of Melisandre's motives is one of the most compelling mysteries of *Game Of Thrones*. Since her introduction, the character has

▷▷



The recently bereaved Ellaria Sand (Indira Varma) alongside newcomer Areo Hotah (DeObia Oparei).



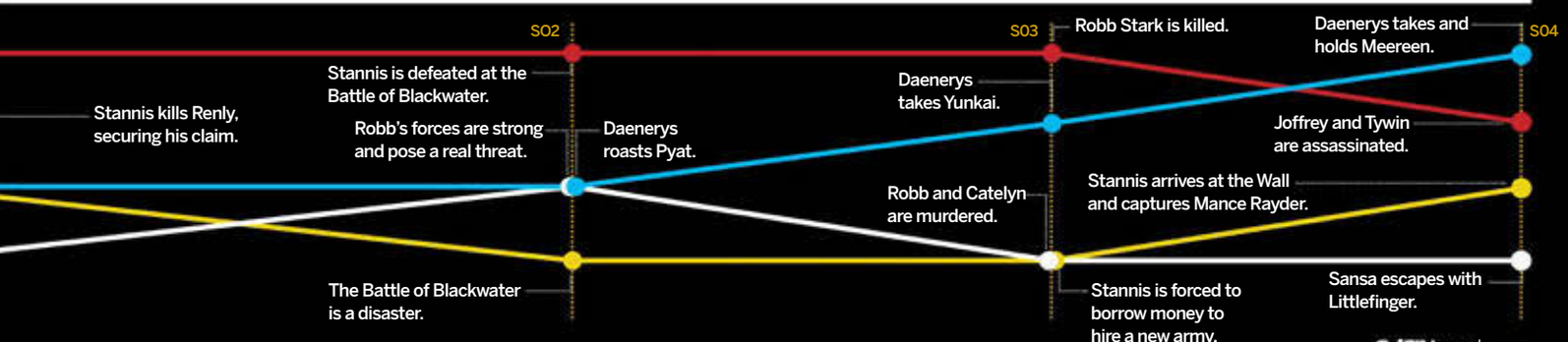
The new season sees Cersei (Lena Headey) finally gain the power she has always craved.



Jonathan Pryce shows up to make things difficult in King's Landing as the High Sparrow.



Daenerys (Emilia Clarke) faces the toughest challenges to her rule yet in Season Five.



very clearly been working to her own agenda, but that agenda is decidedly unclear. Her allegiance is to the Lord of Light, but is her loyalty to Stannis only valid for as long as he is useful? Is her burning heretics and covering easily manipulated teenagers' bodies with leeches all for the greater good?

"IT'S HARD, BECAUSE IT'S NOT REALLY CLEAR TO ME EITHER SOMETIMES," REVEALS VAN HOUTEN. "I MEAN, I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT SHE'S DOING IT FOR A GREATER GOOD. That's the way I try to play it, because otherwise I'm just plain evil, and that's boring to play. So her methods may not be very gentle, they may be very cruel indeed, but I have a feeling that she knows, she can see the bigger picture; she can see what we're really dealing with. All these wars that we're talking about, that's not what we should be fighting for, there's something way bigger than that, that nobody can foresee. And in order to control it or to stop it, we have to make crazy sacrifices, and she doesn't really show that much emotion about that, that's true. That's the way I try to play her, and I have to say that Season Five is very interesting concerning the arc of my character and where she's going."

The depth and complexity of Melisandre's character is in no way exclusive to her, and Cunningham tells us that the continued high quality of the writing is the reason why we continue to see so many excellent performances and why amazing actors continue to flock to *Game Of Thrones*.

"It's kind of required," he explains. "It's a show about power and legacy and family against this backdrop of dragons and this weird feudal medieval world. But you can't have people who don't know what they're doing; the show has been cast incredibly cleverly. When you've got people of the quality of Peter Dinklage and Diana Rigg and Charles Dance and right through, we could name everybody on this... it's an incredible showcase because of the quality, it all comes down to the writing.

"The writing is magnificent on this, the production values are extraordinary, and the show has turned into a phenomenon because of the quality of it. It's extraordinary, there's not one type of person who watches it. It's right across the board, it's seen as one of the best things that television has ever produced, and quite rightly so, and I think we'd all consider ourselves incredibly lucky to be in it."

"I think for me right now it just seems like normal, because this was my first job," laughs Sophie Turner, who plays the increasingly politically astute



"I'M AN INCREDIBLY LUCKY ACTOR TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN SOMETHING LIKE THIS"
KIT HARINGTON



It looks like the story of Podrick (Daniel Portman) and Brienne (Gwendoline Christie) will take a departure from the books.



Margaery (Natalie Dormer) may be Queen, but you can bet that Cersei will have something to say about it.



Things go from bad to worse for Tyrion (Peter Dinklage), on the run after murdering his father.

It looks like Stannis (Stephen Dillane) and Jon (Kit Harington) will be a surprise double act.







A Song Of Ice And Fandom

Westeros.org co-founder and co-author of The World Of Ice And Fire Elio M García Jr on the world's most devoted fanbase

Few authors have inspired the same level of fanaticism as George RR Martin. The world of *Game Of Thrones* is so deep and detailed that legions of fans have been drawn to it. Elio M García Jr is the co-writer of *The World Of Ice And Fire* with George RR Martin and Linda Antonsson, and he tells us that there is one simple reason for the series' success. "George's incredible skill as a storyteller," he states. "He knows how to weave together a narrative that pushes buttons, that has memorable characters and situations. I can't remember what I had for dinner last Sunday, but I can recite almost word-for-word Eddard Stark's exchange with the three Kingsguard at the Tower of Joy."

Together with Antonsson, García Jr founded **Westeros.org** and created an online role-playing game based on the series, all with the permission and encouragement of its author. "We wanted to use a fantasy setting that no one else had used, and *A Song Of Ice And Fire* seemed perfect," he remembers. "So we contacted George to ask his permission... and while we did that, we created a website, just as a way to show we were serious and dedicated. That initial website had our first tries at replicating the heraldry of the Seven Kingdoms, and George was very impressed by it. He gave us permission to create our game, *Blood Of Dragons*, and also sent us batches of names of noble houses and their heraldry."

Since then, the series has only grown in popularity, with the HBO series drawing a whole new area of fandom. "It's grown enormously," he enthuses. "The fandom now includes people who have never actually read the books, and perhaps have no interest in reading them. Though as the show begins to overtake the books, perhaps there'll be new Unsullied, those who choose to be 'book-only' and isolate themselves from potential spoilers from the show."



The World Of Ice And Fire by George RR Martin, Elio M García Jr and Linda Antonsson is available now, published by Harper Voyager.

Sansa Stark, last seen setting out with the Machiavellian Petyr 'Littlefinger' Baelish. "I was 13 [when I started]. All my formative years were spent growing up on a film set, and most of my time was spent on the *Game Of Thrones* set, which is bizarre and difficult for people at home to understand, but it's been like a massive drama class that you can never get at home or school. This is what the industry is for me, and I'm sure it will be crap after this show ends, but when it comes to an end I'll realise how lucky I was to be a part of it, and how huge it was in comparison to so many other things and just how well it's done."

"This could be the one thing, and the only thing that I am known for," concludes Harington. "I'll be very lucky if it is, an incredibly lucky actor to have ever been involved in something like this. It's all downhill from here! I left drama school, and I've got a picture of me, Alfie and Richard Madden [the late Robb Stark] on the very first day of the read through of the pilot. We really do look like kids, and I felt like a kid back then. I didn't feel like an adult back then. Looking back now, I think I feel like an adult now, I don't know"

NATURALLY, THIS HUMBLE PERSPECTIVE DOESN'T MEAN THAT EVERYONE'S ANXIOUS TO BE OUT OF THE SHOW JUST YET. WITH EVERY PASSING SEASON THE body count gets bigger and bigger, and it's only natural for the cast to worry about whether or not George RR Martin has drawn a line through their names.

"You want to stay with the story, you want to see it through to the end," enthuses Cunningham. "Certainly I do. I don't want to leave before the story finishes, I want to try and stay as long as I can, but I do love the idea of not knowing. We shoot season by season, but a lot of it is done reasonably chronologically as you go along, so apart from reading those scripts we don't know what's coming in the next season – we certainly don't know what's happening in Six. But it's extraordinary to read them and then play it. It's like life, it rolls out in front of you and you have no idea what's coming. That's kind of cool. Also, my children have got used to wearing shoes which is quite unusual for them!"

"You know that you're definitely coming into the season, whether it's to leave at some point you don't know," explains Emmanuel. "I suppose that could be slightly nerve-wracking, but I think, I feel like that's something that happens a lot on *Game Of Thrones*, and to be killed or to leave or whatever isn't that unlikely and I've kind of accepted that that could happen to my character and I'd be just happy to have been a part of it at all so, and I just hope that it would be done in a nice way or a cool way or something that makes people feel something,"

"Valar Morghulis," chuckles Cunningham. Valar Morghulis indeed.

Season Five of *Game Of Thrones* will air on Sky Atlantic from 13 April.



Events will conspire to expand the wedge between siblings Cersei and Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau).

"YOU WANT TO STAY WITH THE STORY; YOU WANT TO SEE IT THROUGH TO THE END"
LIAM CUNNINGHAM



Dear Margaery...

Struggling to deal with a life-changing event? Wondering how to cope with a potentially deadly social function? Worrying about whether you'll climb the social ladder? Just ask the most gifted operator in all the Seven Kingdoms: our very own Margaery Tyrell!

Dear Margaery...

I recently saw my new uncle push my aunt through a Sky Door. I don't know if I can trust him, but he's proven he knows how to manipulate a situation, and I think he might be the lesser of a lot of evils. What should I do?
S, The Eerie

Dear S, the first lesson to learn is that you should never trust anybody. Not even me, haha! It's vital that you figure out what this uncle of yours can do for you and how devoted he is to you. He's already shown he's capable of murder (although who in Westeros isn't?), so you have to assume that there's at least a chance that he might be looking for a Sky Door to push you through at some point. However, if it looks like he's got your best interests at heart at the moment, there's no harm in playing along, at least for now. Keep your eyes open and see what you can learn from him if he's a master manipulator.

Dear Margaery...

I've recently come into possession of a young charge, but I'm worried she doesn't trust me. What do you recommend?
P, The Eerie

Dear P, most people can be won over with a demonstration of usefulness and understanding. With a younger charge, it can be a little more difficult. I myself recently had great success with a night-time visit and a gift in the form of a cat. Everyone loves a cat.



OBERYN MARTELL
FIGHTDANCE STUDIO
We regret to inform that all future classes are cancelled indefinitely. Any outstanding coupons may be redeemed for their monetary value or brothel discounts. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

Dear Margaery...

Having been accused of a crime I didn't commit, I have now committed a bigger one. Should I abandon the kingdom I've known for my whole life, not to mention my family? Actually, the family part isn't too important...
T, address withheld.

Dear T, don't let a crime drag you down. If there's one thing that history has taught us, it's that any misdemeanour can be forgiven or forgotten eventually; it's just a question of how you manage to get your forgiveness. That being said, if you're who I think you are (no names!) there is definitely a pretty serious manhunt currently underway, so I heartily encourage you to get out of town for a while. Similarly, abandoning kingdoms can be a blessing. If your situation isn't working out for you, look for the next best option and move on. I wish you all the best in your travels.

Dear Margaery...

I've worked very hard in politics for many years, but have finally decided to throw it all away for what I believe is right. Did I make the right decision?
V, address withheld.

Dear V, as I said to T (and I think you might be reading this together), there is no shame in letting something go. Sometimes, you've just got to roll the dice and make the difficult choice in order to achieve your desired goal. It's also worth noting that a burned bridge is simply an obstacle to overcome. If things don't work out in your new situation, a man with your talents can always find a way to be useful again.

Dear Margaery...

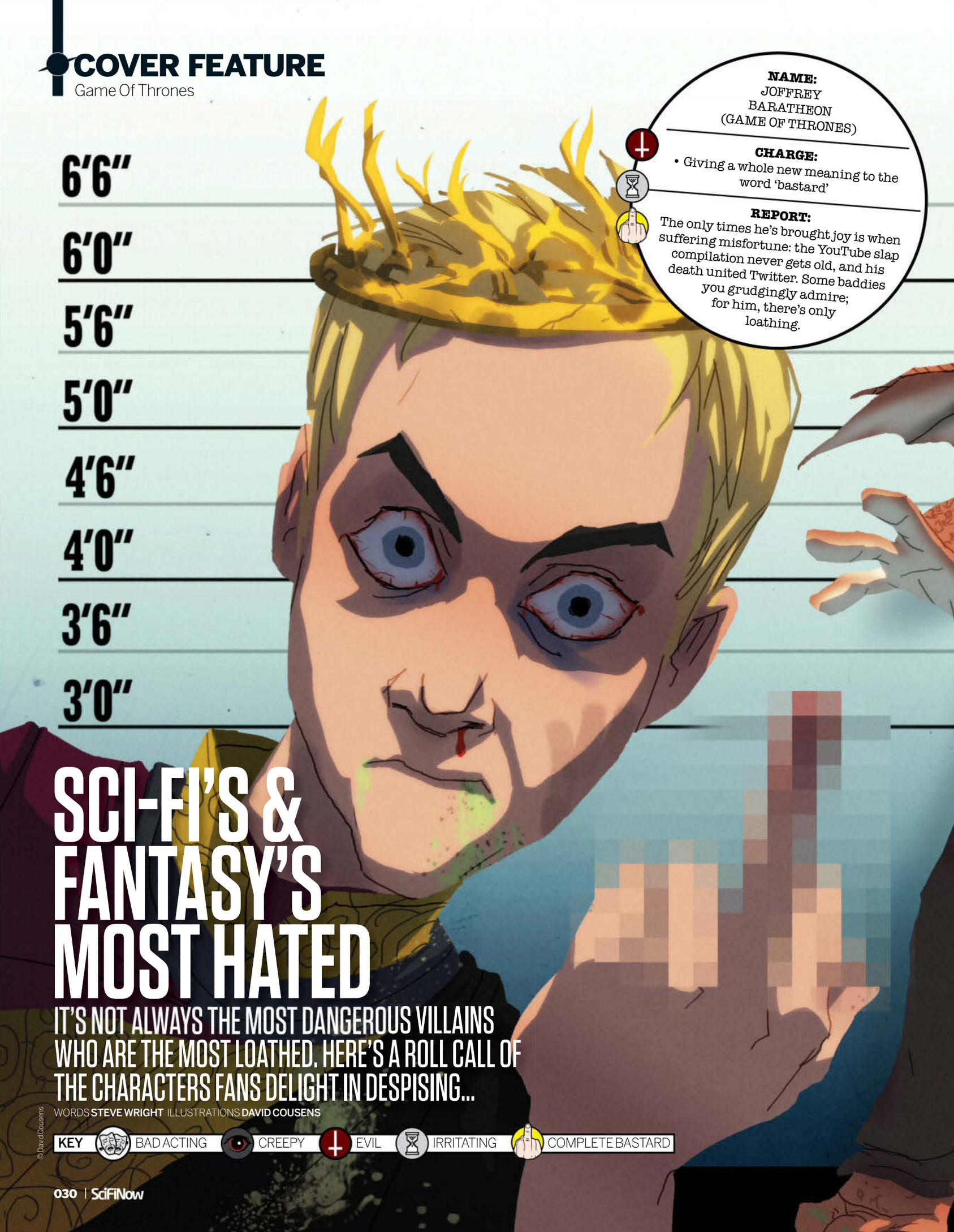
...actually, never mind. Everything's fine. Just ignore me.
~~Theon~~ Reek, the basement.

Dear Reek, no one will respect you if you don't start standing up for yourself. Buck your ideas up.

How to deal with your monster mother/sister-in-law

We all know the in-laws can be nightmares. Most of them can be won over with a bit of kindness and a nice smile. Some of them just want you gone. Here's an example of a woman who simply cannot be won over...





SCI-FI'S & FANTASY'S MOST HATED

IT'S NOT ALWAYS THE MOST DANGEROUS VILLAINS WHO ARE THE MOST LOATHED. HERE'S A ROLL CALL OF THE CHARACTERS FANS DELIGHT IN DESPISING...

WORDS **STEVE WRIGHT** ILLUSTRATIONS **DAVID COUSENS**

KEY: BAD ACTING | CREEPY | EVIL | IRRITATING | COMPLETE BASTARD

© David Cousens



NAME:
JAR JAR BINKS (STAR WARS)

CHARGE:
• Existing

REPORT:
Jar Jar is an amphibious Pee-Wee Herman who radiates soul-crushing inanity with every syllable that spills from his hateful mouth. Despite barely appearing in *The Phantom Menace*'s two sequels, he still has time to ensure the galaxy will spend years under the rule of a despot.

NAME:
HARRY POWELL (THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER)

CHARGES:
• Giving religion a bad name
• Not picking on people his own size

REPORT:
History is full of people who pervert religion to their own ends, so his mystique remains relevant. From the way he uses women to how he disposes of them, he is one of cinema's enduring hate figures.

NAME:
GAIUS BALTAR (BATTLESTAR GALACTICA)

CHARGES:
• Punching above his weight
• Inexplicably staying alive

REPORT:
Self-serving and cowardly, Baltar's actions are geared towards his own survival. Even his redemption comes tinged with disappointment at the way everyone seems to forget that he's responsible for genocide.



NAME:
DENETHOR
(RETURN OF THE KING)

CHARGES:
- Being the world's worst dad
- Eating like a slob

REPORT:
By virtue of his actions (or lack thereof) Denethor had everyone screaming. The Steward was charged with protecting Gondor – instead, he wallowed in grief, let his son Faramir lead a suicide charge, and even tried to burn him alive.

NAME:
CAPTAIN VIDAL
(PAN'S LABYRINTH)

CHARGES:
- Being the most monstrous character in a film full of monsters
- Shooting a little girl. I mean, come on

REPORT:
Fascism is a fertile source of cinematic hate figures. Obsessed with General Franco's regime, Vidal thinks nothing of casual murder and torture, and is totally unambiguous in his evil nature.

NAME:
NEELIX
(STAR TREK: VOYAGER)

CHARGES:
- Being the Jar Jar of *Star Trek*
- Dating what is essentially a child

REPORT:
When you're more irritating than Wesley Crusher you know something's up. For crying out loud, his title is 'Morale Officer' – we all know that's only a few rungs above 'Milk Monitor'. Plus, he dates one-year-old Kes, essentially making him a sex offender.



NAME:
ANAKIN SKYWALKER
(STAR WARS)

CHARGES:
- Diminishing an icon
- Killing kids. Again, what the hell?

Whiny and childish, everything about young Vader feels wrong. The fact that it took *Clone Wars* decent portrayal highlighted how bad Hayden Christensen's performance was.

NAME:
DOLORES UMBRIDGE
(HARRY POTTER)

CHARGES:
- Being Hogwarts' Nigel Farage
- Damaging the rep of cat owners

REPORTS:
Kept her sadism and xenophobia wrapped up in a bow of smug vindictiveness. Even Harry displays particular ire for her, and seeing her blasted over a table forever remains satisfying.

NAME:
PRESIDENT SNOW
(THE HUNGER GAMES)

CHARGES:
- Putting the 'dic' in dictator
- Having the world's worst facial hair

REPORT:
Masking his malevolence with scented flowers and a forced grin, he orders countless deaths and destruction from behind his desk. He's a firm exponent of the bastard staple of targeting loved ones.



SLEEPY HOLLOW STAR TOM MISON ON CANCELLING THE APOCALYPSE AND WHY THE REST OF SEASON TWO WILL SEE THINGS GET EVEN STRANGER FOR ICHABOD CRANE...

WORDS **ABIGAIL CHANDLER**

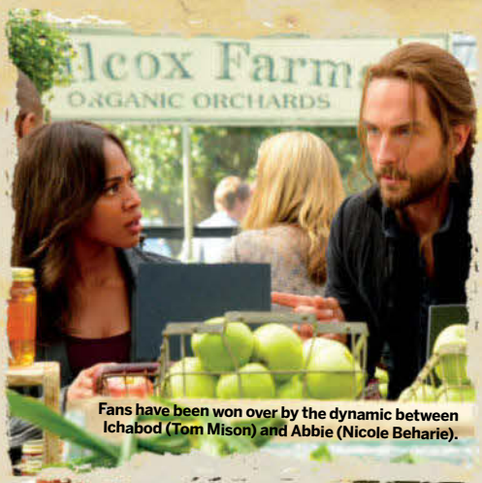
RIDING THE APOCALYPSE

IF FANTASY TV HAS TAUGHT US ONE THING, IT'S THAT YOU ALWAYS SAVE THE SHOW-STOPPER FOR THE SEASON FINALE. UNLESS YOU'RE SLEEPY HOLLOW, IN WHICH case you splurge an Apocalypse, the death of the big baddie and the shock demise of a main character on a lowly mid-season finale. Well, *Sleepy Hollow* isn't exactly known for being what you expect it to be.

What could have been a poor modern-day update of Washington Irving's short story *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow* turned out instead to be a man-out-of-time buddy comedy, a horror show and everything in between.

When UK viewers last saw Ichabod Crane (Tom Mison) and Lieutenant Abbie Mills (Nicole Beharie), they had successfully killed Moloch (Derek Mears) and stopped the Apocalypse, with some unlikely last-minute help from Ichabod's son Henry (John Noble), whose teenage rebellion phase has continued well past middle age.

We also saw the surprising death of Captain Irving (Orlando Jones). "When someone dies in *Sleepy Hollow* you can safely expect they'll be back," says Mison, the British actor who brings Ichabod to life. "But for the rest of this season the danger returns and there's death coming, and it's rather more permanent."



Fans have been won over by the dynamic between Ichabod (Tom Mison) and Abbie (Nicole Beharie).



If they're the Witnesses and they're supposed to stop the Apocalypse, if for all intents and purposes the Apocalypse has been stopped, where do they go? Does she go back to Quantico and start training for the FBI? What does Ichabod do? I'll have to get a haircut and a job, and that doesn't sound like fun... So Ichabod's worried, it goes into quite an existential crisis: what am I if I've completed the mission and I'm still here?"

Ichabod isn't the only character who is left without a path to follow. Now that Henry has killed his master, will he start to come round to the side of the angels? That's far too much to hope for. Mison tells us that Henry has had "time to digest, to plan his next move, so when he does come back he comes back with a bang. He's not going to muck about anymore, and he's not going to accept 'but I'm your father', 'but I'm your mother' anymore; he wants blood."

Moloch might have been the show's chief monster, but let's be honest – Henry has been the true villain of the piece all along, powered by bitterness and abandonment issues. What with Henry's rage and Katrina's habit of telling small untruths, things aren't looking great for the Cranes as we go into the second half of Season Two.

"The Cranes are doomed!" Mison laughs. "They've been doomed from the start! They're out of odds with each other, they're out of odds with their time, they're out of odds with how they plan to spend their time. They were always doomed from the moment Ichabod came out of the ground and Katrina came out of Purgatory and Henry was the Horseman of War. I think particularly in the latter half of the season you'll start to see that snowball."

"THE CRANES ARE DOOMED! THEY'VE BEEN DOOMED FROM THE START! THEY'RE OUT OF ODDS WITH EACH OTHER, THEY'RE OUT OF ODDS WITH THEIR TIME, THEY'RE OUT OF ODDS WITH HOW THEY PLAN TO SPEND THEIR TIME"
TOM MISON

For a season and a half now, *Sleepy Hollow* has been driven by Moloch and his plans to take over Earth. Now he's dead, where does the show go? Who better to ask than Mison, an endearing nerd with a penchant for penguins ("I'm going to work in my own zoo, and I'll feed the bloody penguins every day!") and books ("I learnt a really lovely word the other day – a lovely Japanese word, 'tsundoku', which means 'a pile of unread books'").

So what's next for Ichabod? "This is the big dilemma for him and for Abbie. After we've seen Moloch die and Henry disappears, what do they do next?


Katrina (Katia Winter) hasn't been the most popular character among sections of the fanbase.

Poor Katrina (Katia Winter) didn't stand a chance with the fans of the show. They are so invested in the Ichabod/Abbie partnership that any new addition to the dynamic is greeted with suspicion at best and a concentrated social media attack ➤

at worst. Hawley (Matt Barr), a new addition to Season Two who's been making eyes at Abbie, has been met with similar hostility.

"The promising thing about the group of people who create this show is that they've been listening," Mison says tactfully. "They're aware of what is popular and what is less popular. It's very difficult to ignore it; we have a very vocal fanbase, which we've been very grateful for... So we try something, and if it sticks we can roll with it and if it's less popular then we can twist it. I think that's a very positive way to react to the criticism."



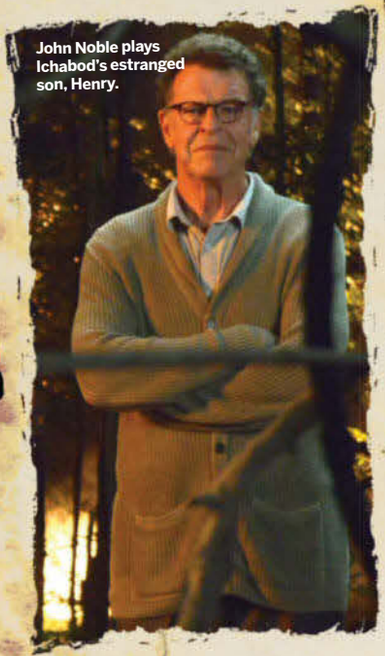
Sleepy Hollow is a surprise hit that has endured.

BUT WHILE FANS MAY DISAGREE WITH SOME ASPECTS OF THE SHOW, THAT'S JUST A DROP IN THE OCEAN COMPARED TO WHAT THEY LOVE ABOUT IT. SLEEPY HOLLOW ISN'T LIKE anything else on TV – it's funny, scary and heartfelt all at once, and few shows can get quite so many laughs out of their male lead's hatred of jeans ("I think Ichabod just finds them too uncomfortable. He needs room to breathe, if you know what I mean").

But Season Two sees some changes coming, with the producers promising a move away from serialised stories and towards more episodic tales. The fans have greeted this news with weariness – a move to episodic stories usually indicates that a show needs to gain new viewers, and quickly. But Mison has a more positive outlook on things. "I have absolute faith that it won't become the dreaded monster-of-the-week; it will be much fuller than that. With so many great ideas from [the writers], I think we can easily fill another season with just what they've got now, let alone what they'll have in a few months... I think it will be a welcome change."

Sleepy Hollow was the surprise hit of 2013, outlasting shows that arrived in a cloud of hype. Few people can say a bad word about it. We asked Mison just what he thinks makes it so special, and he started telling us about going to see horror movie *The Babadook*. "Afterwards," he continues, "I kind of had a bit of an epiphany that the thing that has always been most successful with *Sleepy Hollow* has been when it's a horror film every week, but a horror film that gets the joke.

"That's when I find it the most exciting to watch, and I suspect also that's the most exciting to shoot. The horror that gets the joke. It's also quite unique on telly, and that's something that I'm sure we'll try to strive towards in the coming episodes."



John Noble plays Ichabod's estranged son, Henry.



According to Mison, co-star Winter "can say anything, and it destroys me."

The other reason the show works so well is perhaps something that Mison is too humble to suggest – he and Nicole Beharie work so brilliantly together as Ichabod and Abbie. "It's such a joy to play," he says. "It's so nice when you're part of a pair. We have to rely on each other an awful lot, Nicole and Tom, as much as Ichabod and Abbie... It's fun to play with Nicole, and we throw ideas in, we seem to agree on everything, which is very fortunate.

"We both come from a background where the scene is more important than the individual actor, so we're both striving to get the best out of a scene rather than show ourselves off. And I think that's where the magic lies – we're both trying to tell the story and come at it from the same direction. It's a real treat. It's a real joy." A mischievous tone creeps into his voice. "And I'm sure she loves me. She loves working with me. She's learnt everything from me, and it's a pleasure to teach her."

While making *Sleepy Hollow* has its challenges ("I don't think I've ever done a job with so much exposition... that's the hardest thing: keeping the exposition fresh and natural and interesting"), it seems to generally be as much of a delight to film as it is to watch. He has nothing but nice things to say about his co-stars, saying in his understated way that "we work together rather nicely", and that Winter "can say anything, and it destroys me." The cast are all active on social media, engaging with the fans and getting the joke as much as the show does.

Sleepy Hollow hasn't yet been picked up for a third season, and Mison has wrapped filming without knowing whether or not he'll ever "get to put those boots on again." He's already dropping hints about the upcoming season finale though.

"Brace yourselves," he says. "There's not going to be the cliffhanger-type ending of Season One. We're not going to repeat that. Instead, there is such a level of finality that is rather shocking, that will again change everything. It's an exciting way to end the season."

Let's hope the 'finality' he talks of isn't all that final. But even if it is, at least we have a half-season of joy ahead of us.

Sleepy Hollow: Season Two will return to the Universal Channel on Thursday 26 March.



Mison teases an uncertain future for Ichabod and co.

Living the legend

How TV is drawing on stories and fairy tales of yore



Grimm
Taking its cue (and name) from the assorted fairy tales written by the eponymous brothers, there is no shortage of recognisable creatures on show.



Once Upon A Time
All your favourite fairy tale characters are present, from Snow White and Prince Charming to, er, the cast of *Frozen*.



Da Vinci's Demons
The myths surrounding the life of the enigmatic genius take centre stage. Lover, inventor, fighter – few areas of his supposed secret life are left unturned.



Penny Dreadful
Basically a televised version of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, it features Dracula, Frankenstein, Dorian Gray and more.



Atlantis
Starting out well, this populist take on the titular lost island ultimately sank without a trace.






MIGHTY
AVENGERS
THE INVINCIBLE
IRON MAN
AVENGERS
AVENGERS
BEHOLD
THE
VISION!

©Rex

PULLING THE STRINGS

IT'S BEEN ALMOST THREE YEARS SINCE THE AVENGERS TEAMED UP TO SAVE NEW YORK FROM DESTRUCTION. WITH THE WORLD SOON TO BE IN PERIL ONCE MORE, WE TALK TO DIRECTOR JOSS WHEDON ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM **AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON...**

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**
INTERVIEWS **POPPY-JAY PALMER, STEVEN DEEKS**

IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT WITH AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON, JOSS WHEDON HAS A TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW. WHEN YOUR LAST FRANCHISE OUTING FEATURED A NON COMPOS MENTIS NORSE GOD UNLEASHING AN ARMY OF ANCIENT ALIEN WARRIORS ON NEW YORK City, intent on beating the whole of humankind into subjugation, to be faced by a team of Marvel's most formidable (and marketable) superheroes, there's only so much you can do to the sequel to make it come out on top.

Having taken time out for their respective solo movies, *Age Of Ultron* sees Tony 'Iron Man' Stark (Robert Downey Jr), Steve 'Captain America' Rogers (Chris Evans) and Thor (Chris Hemsworth) reuniting with Bruce 'Hulk' Banner (Mark Ruffalo), Natasha 'Black Widow' Romanov (Scarlett Johansson), Clint 'Hawkeye' Barton (Jeremy Renner) and Nick Fury (Samuel L Jackson).

Age Of Ultron is going to be awesome, there's no doubt about it. It's a given, because a) it's the Avengers, and b) Joss Whedon has come back to write it/direct it/make it awesome. But will it be more awesome than the first? Will it encapsulate the fun and sheer comic book-aping majesty of the first movie? Do Joss and co successfully kick it up a notch, and in the process make *Ultron* bigger, better and more badass than ever before?

"You know, I believe we do," Whedon tells us. "But you're trying to think of... the reason I took the gig was when I started to think about, well, what do these guys still have to say to each other? And realising, oh my God, the interpersonal stuff is bonkers and there's so much to do. And then you go about the ultimately laborious task of thinking how can we make things terrible and cause an action climax, and yeah, how can we take this up a notch?

"It's more about feeling different than about necessarily being bigger. I mean, I would have no problem if this film were shorter than the first one. It won't be, because I just have way too many characters," he laughs. "But at the same time, nobody was looking towards bigger. We were looking towards recapturing what people loved about the first one and then doing something very different with that feeling. The fact that we got to shoot all over the world and



Don't make the Hulk angry. A tip Stark doesn't seem to have taken.



Black Widow's suit has been given the same renovation treatment as Cap.

the fact that it just has a very different palette and the fact that we *could* go bonkers with some of our sequences meant that it does play, I think, at a slightly higher intensity. But if the emotional intensity is higher then that won't really matter."

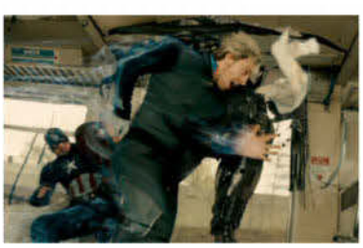
The dynamic established in the team proved to be a big hit in *Avengers Assemble*, particularly between Stark and Banner, which has sparked many a 'science bros' meme, and Black Widow and Hawkeye as a pair of solo-movie-less allied assassins. Whedon's interpersonal approach to *Age Of Ultron* promises to dig deeper into the friendships and relationships among the team. Who knows, maybe we will finally find out what happened in Budapest.

"I FEEL IT'S A TINY BIT MORE OF A GROWN-UP

movie, despite how silly I like to get," Whedon tells us. "For the first movie, I was very favourish [sic] to the 3D aesthetic, and the structure of the thing was bringing people together. Now they're together, so needless to say, the structure of this one is tearing them apart. Because I'm able to get into their heads a little bit more, I get to see how really damaged they are and how a team like this, whether or not it can sustain, whether they can be a team.

"It was shot very, very differently than the last one, and very differently from almost anything I've done. I really wanted to put people in the Avengers as opposed to sort of presenting the Avengers to them, and so the camera work is a lot less studied and arched, and a lot more like, 'Oh, we just happened to find – Oh! Look over there, there's a Hulk! You should look at that!' And I sort of said we're going to stop, not composing frames obviously, but stop announcing it and really try to make it more casual, and in doing so it turned out I think much more beautiful."

The change of style that Whedon refers to has already been made evident in various previews, particularly in the extended trailer released last year, in which the team swap Shawarma for a sophisticated Stark Tower cocktail party, punctuated by wisecrack-ridden attempts by the team to lift Thor's hammer. However, while the scene may have been fun for the viewers, the experience of putting it together didn't quite translate behind the scenes for the crew.









There must always be a Stark in the MCU

Robert Downey Jr on Ultron, egos and Mark Ruffalo



Stark and Banner ended up friends after *Avengers Assemble*. Is that friendship going to grow some more?
Both our characters are kind of scientists or inventor-type guys, so they have this natural synergy, and in this film I give him somewhere to live and work. It's clear Mark [Ruffalo] and I had chemistry in the first movie, and so we're expanding on that. Mark is actually more like the character he plays – [minus] the big green guy. I mean, you could ask him anything that Bruce Banner would be interested in and he can talk about it. He's actually out there trying to impact things, and he knows what he's talking about.

Is Stark's notoriously big ego still present for round two?
Well, he winds up getting everyone into trouble, but he's not doing it for selfish reasons. He's doing it because he's got a big idea, which is that the Avengers put themselves out of a job by creating a situation that will keep the world safe.

What about your own?
I'm the most humble guy I know!

Does playing Stark while he's surrounded by other superheroes, like in *Age Of Ultron*, feel different to playing him in the *Iron Man* movies?
Every time I play Stark it feels like the first time, and sometimes it's more daunting because people have this projection of him, while every time you have to remember what it was about the character that made him so popular. But the nice thing is I think we all feel like that. Me and Mark will sometimes look at each other and go, 'I don't know what I'm meant to be doing' or 'I've forgotten my lines'.

You filmed *Age Of Ultron* all over the world: South Africa, South Korea, Italy, Bangladesh... How do you enjoy filming on location?
When you're on location you tend to interact with folks more. You want to shoot at home when you can, but you can't anymore if you live in LA, where everyone goes home after shooting. So what makes it fun is that we're having continuity of experience with everyone.

What about working with Joss Whedon?
He's super self-critical and really conscious. I think it's fun that we're now starting off with a known entity, and I think it's noticeable that he's got his legs under him and he's really swinging from the fences. Everybody that Joss brought in was a natural fit, so he's created this little unit where everyone genuinely likes and respects each other, and likes what we're doing. It's not like the third season of a series where no one's talking and people go, "Great, they're going to kill me off this week."

What are your thoughts on James Spader as Ultron?
Casting has been the key to the success of these movies, and I was like, 'Wow, that never even occurred to me'. And unlike other bad guys we've had, he's here every day just doing it up. He's been brilliant, it's been the best possible idea. We're stoked we have him.

> "TONY WINDS UP GETTING EVERYONE IN TROUBLE, BUT HE'S NOT DOING IT FOR SELFISH REASONS"
> ROBERT DOWNEY JR

© Rex

Ultron Assembled

What is his deal?



Ultron origins

In the comics, Ultron was constructed by Dr Hank Pym, but he ultimately rebelled against Pym, hypnotising and brainwashing him.



Remember, remember

Ultron has a memory capacity of 3.2 terabytes, which can hold the equivalent of 54,400 hours of music or 992,000 photos.



Heavy metal

Ultron is made from an extremely dense, virtually indestructible iron-based alloy called Adamantium, the same substance that is bonded to Wolverine's skeleton.



Power up

Ultron's powers include superhuman strength, superhuman durability and genius-level intellect, what with him being an AI and all.



One Vision

Ultron created Vision from an android Human Torch, but Vision – who retained the memories of the Torch – turned against him.



O Captain

Ultron devised the supervillain team Masters of Evil, which consisted of Black Knight, Klaw, Melter, Radioactive Man and Whirlwind.



Build-A-Wife

Ultron built himself a robot mate named Jocasta, and brainwashed Hank Pym into putting the mind of Janet Van Dyne in her shell.



That's heavy

Though he's had many different forms and incarnations, Ultron's original form was six-foot-nine tall, and weighed 735 lbs.



Foe-zoned

Even though Jocasta was programmed to be loyal to Ultron, she eventually betrayed him and teamed up with the Avengers.



Soaring, flying

Much like Iron Man, Ultron has rocket boosters that allow him to fly, as well as laser-channelled concussion blasters.

To see more exclusive **Avengers: Age Of Ultron** wall decals and find out how you can own them, head to **Fathead.com!**

"That was a weird scene for me," Whedon says. "I started to shoot it, and it was terrible! By the end, I turned to my assistant director and was just like, 'Can you make it stop?' and he was like, 'Thank you, everybody! Good day!' And I went off and I was like, what's wrong with this scene? And I realised I hadn't given myself up to the idea of shooting it in a sort of casual, handheld 'here we all are', sort of 'happy to be here, let's live in the moment' way.

"And then I also realised that I had just shot an entire movie that way, *Much Ado About Nothing* [his 2012 modern-day Shakespeare adaptation], which is *only* people sitting around and drinking. I was like, 'Oh right, right! I'll stop composing and start, just, mixing it up. Making it nice and messy.' So we came back the next day to a completely different concept of how that works, and people really respond to their casual camaraderie."

ANOTHER ISSUE THAT THE SEQUEL FACED WAS WHO TO PICK AS A BADDIE, WITH TWO OF MARVEL'S formidable villains, Magneto and Doctor Doom, securely fastened under the Fox banner of the *X-Men* and *Fantastic Four* series. Moreover, it's fair to say that Tom Hiddleston's Loki was a phenomenal hit in *Avengers Assemble*. He left behind the last shred of nobility and dignity he possessed at the start of *Thor*, and embodied something more hateful and despicable than the supervillains that came before, becoming a scene-stealer and a lot of fans' favourite character, even though he was a brain full of cats, as Banner so memorably put it. He had an amazing ability to make fans not only hate him with the intensity of the Tesseract, but make them also want to have his babies. That last trait might be at least partly down to Hiddleston himself.

Sci-fi sequels often have a good track record with villains. The first film in a series is usually there to set up the heroes, and the second allows us to have more fun with the forces fighting against them. As the movie's subtitle borrows his name, we can expect to see a lot of Ultron (James Spader) – literally – in the sequel. *Ultron*'s trailer debut offered a lot to get excited about, from his broken, robotic body staggering into Stark Tower to the soundtrack of Spader reciting lyrics from Pinocchio's *I've Got No Strings* in a voice far too harsh and creepy for comfort.

"Ultron has been such a mainstay villain, and because he's a robot he's very different from Loki, and also he gives a chance to create a character – actually, I should say create with James and ILM [visual effects company Industrial Light & Magic] – a character that really is unique, that shares an ability with Loki to get inside the Avengers and call them on their bullshit," says Whedon regarding the chrome-domed supervillain. "But unlike Loki, he's actually just not stable! He is brilliant, but a little unhinged, and there are opportunities for a kind of humour that you don't usually get to play with for artificial intelligence, and at the same time he's





Super siblings Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch make their full-feature debut.



the big, eight-foot metal guy. He's very imposing. And that combination of James Spader's idiosyncratic, extraordinary wandering mind inside this towering, terrifying body is just a delight."

AS IF THEY DIDN'T ALREADY HAVE THEIR HANDS FULL WITH THE HUNDREDS OF MINI ULTRONS THE trailers saw them pitted against, Earth's Mightiest Heroes will also face sibling duo Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver, referred to by HYDRA high-up Baron von Strucker (Thomas Kretschmann) as heralds of "the Age of Miracles" and played by Elizabeth Olsen and Aaron Taylor-Johnson respectively. Though the characters will likely be recruited as Avengers by the end of the movie, they start off as allies of Ultron. "I couldn't just have one villain whose only sidekick is himself," Whedon jokes. "I wanted more perspectives on what's wrong with the Avengers."

Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver – aka Wanda and Pietro Maximoff – made their first appearance in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*'s mid-credits scene, locked up in an underground HYDRA facility by Strucker, both seemingly on the verge of madness. Their combined seven seconds of screen time, although brief, was haunting and eerily captivating, so really we were already curious to see what Olsen and Taylor-Johnson would be bringing to the table before the first trailer dropped.

"They are phenomenal, those two," says Whedon regarding the cast's two newest additions. "They have enormous gravitas and they are harbouring a lot of anger. The characters, I mean Lizzie and Aaron, are absolute goofballs. But then when the camera rolls, they whip out the cheekbones and glare into the lens, and you're like, 'Ooh, nooo, don't be mad at me'. You know, they really invested in the pain that drives these kids, and were never afraid to go to a dark place with them and then work from there, which is exciting, because they are a very different flavour to we've experienced with this kind of stuff."

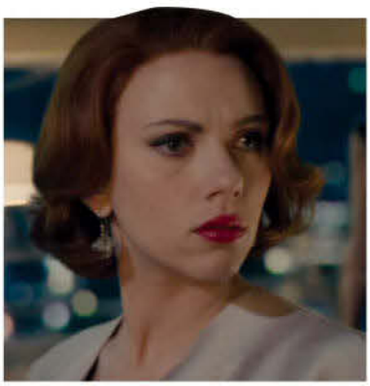
The introductions of the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver, coupled with the presence of another robot in The Vision (played by former JARVIS Paul Bettany) and Andy Serkis as *Black Panther* villain Ulysses Klaw (likely a lead-up to the 2018 *Black Panther* movie, a theory backed up by the apparent presence of a Dora Milaje, one of the Panther's elite female bodyguards, in the latest trailer), sees the Marvel Cinematic Universe getting even bigger. What direction it expands in will be determined by the climax of *Age Of Ultron*, but whatever happens, you can be sure that it'll be yet another game-changer.

Avengers: Age Of Ultron will be released in UK cinemas on 24 April.





What fans want to see is the Hulk coming to blows with the Hulkbuster.





Run Cap, run! The First Avenger is no longer a part of the fallen SHIELD.



Downey Jr and Ruffalo are very much aware of their fan-coined nickname, the 'Science Bros'.



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> "ME AND MARK WILL LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND GO, 'I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M MEANT TO BE DOING'"
> ROBERT DOWNEY JR

From the mouths of knaves

Ultron chews the scenery with savage glee. Here are Marvel's finest villains doing the same



"I won't touch Barton, not until I make him kill you! Slowly, intimately, in every way he knows you fear! And then he'll wake just long enough to see his good work, and when he screams I'll split his skull! This is my bargain, you mewling quim!"
LOKI



"Hold still, you little prick!"
OBADIAH STANE



"WHAT ARE YOU DOOOOING?"
RONAN THE ACCUSER



"I AM THE MANDARIN!"
ALDRICH KILLIAN



"Darkness returns, Asgardian. Have you come to witness the end of your universe?"
MALEKITH

STARK TOWER THEATRE. FLY-IN

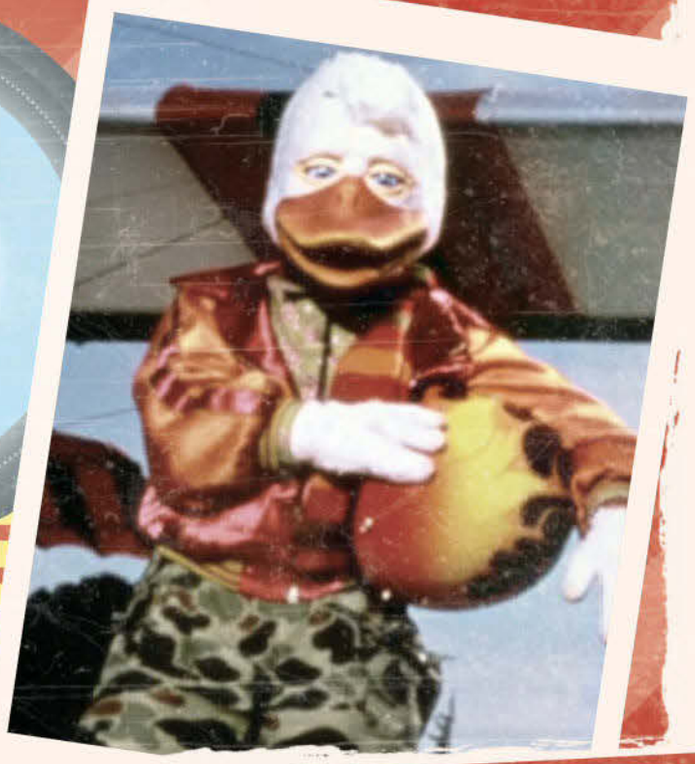
NYC, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA / SHOWS BEGIN AT 6PM

★★★ WEDNESDAY MARCH 11 ★★★

★ A SCIFINOW / KRYSTAL SIM PRESENTATION ★

★★★ EARTH'S MIGHTIEST ZEROES ★★★





15 OF THE WORST MISTAKES MARVEL MADE ON THE ROAD TO THE MCU









AN AVERAGE EVENING FILLED WITH FORGETTABLE FILMS

1 GENERATION X
1996

Dir: Jack Sholder
Cast: Finola Hughes, Jeremy Ratchford, Heather McComb

Like the comic series that inspired it, *Generation X* was meant to be a teen *X-Men* for the cynical Nineties generation. Emma Frost (Finola Hughes) and Sean Cassidy (Jeremy Ratchford) act as mentors to a group of young mutants against the machinations of evil scientist Doctor Russell Tresh, played by a supremely hammy Matt Frewer. It didn't endear itself to fans, with the whitewashing of Chinese-American character Jubilee (played here by Heather McComb), and team members Chamber and Husk were written out simply because the budget couldn't cope with their powers.



2 THE FANTASTIC FOUR
1994

Dir: Oley Sassone
Cast: Alex Hyde-White, Rebecca Staab, Jay Underwood

Watching this unreleased Roger Corman production is a crystallising moment for a comic movie fan, because while schlock like *Red Sonja* (1985) might be over-the-top, at least it looked somewhat like a movie. *The Fantastic Four*'s minuscule budget shows in every frame, and the acting is some of the most camp and ridiculous you are ever likely to witness. In one particularly cringeworthy scene, the Thing (Michael Bailey Smith) is transformed back into his human form when Alicia Masters (Kat Green) says she loves him. Barf.



3 THE PUNISHER
1989

Dir: Mark Goldblatt
Cast: Dolph Lundgren, Louis Gossett Jr, Joerien Krabbe, Kim Miyori

Nothing says 'Eighties action flick' like gratuitous violence, something this 1989 live-action adaptation has in spades. Frank Castle (Dolph Lundgren) is an ex-cop-turned-vigilante whose family was murdered by the mob. Five years into his deadly crusade, he gets embroiled in a turf war between the Mob and the Yakuza, with bloody consequences. It's bursting with action-movie clichés, like a shoot-out at the docks, henchmen jumping away from explosions, and the character's origins are largely the same – although he doesn't wear the trademark skull emblem.



4 MAN-THING
2005

Dir: Brett Leonard
Cast: Mark Stevens, Rachael Taylor, Matthew Le Nevez, Rawiri Paratene

The guardian spirit of the Bywater swamps is angry. Since oil tycoon Fred Schist bought the tribal lands from chieftain Ted Sallis, people have gone missing. Sheriff Williams (Matthew Le Nevez) investigates the disappearances, and discovers that the area is being protected by the plant-like creature called Man-Thing – like a more violent *FernGully*. The character's movie origins are more magical than the comics, where a young biochemist injects himself with Super Soldier Serum and crashes his car into a swamp. It's flawed monster-movie fare, but a decent effort.



5 HOWARD THE DUCK
1986

Dir: Willard Huyck
Cast: Chip Zien, Lea Thompson, Tim Robbins, Jeffrey Jones

One of the more embarrassing films that George Lucas has put his name to, *Howard The Duck* is simply dreadful. Starting out as a fish-out-of-water story as Howard is hurled from a universe of anthropomorphic ducks to contemporary Cleveland, the second half is more action-orientated, with Jeffrey Jones chewing the scenery as a doctor possessed by an evil alien and looking somewhere between Deadite and Kane from *Poltergeist II*. The comic's satirical edge didn't translate to the big screen, and the love scene between Howard and Beverley (Lee Thompson) is uniquely awkward.



6 CAPTAIN AMERICA
1990

Dir: Albert Pyun
Cast: Matt Salinger, Scott Paulin, Ned Beatty, Ronny Cox

There's a line in the low-budget *Captain America* (1990) that jars: "He may not be Superman, but he'll be a living symbol of what this country stands for." They'd never get that past legal today, and they'd never get this type of cheese past a modern audience either. Matt Salinger's incarnation of the Cap isn't particularly heroic; twice he fakes being sick to steal a car. But he does save the President, so that's probably fine. He certainly isn't the Steve Rogers we have become accustomed to as shown in the MCU. It's lucky Marvel have been able to take it back and relaunch it.



7 ELEKTRA
2005

Dir: Rob Bowman
Cast: Jennifer Garner, Goran Visnjic, Kirsten Prout, Will Yun Lee

Revived from her death at the end of *Daredevil*, Elektra (Jennifer Garner) trains under martial arts master Stick (Terrance Stamp). She is expelled for being too full of rage and becomes a contract killer, only to end up protecting her intended targets from ninja crime syndicate, The Hand. The generic ninja plot is nothing to write home about, and sadly this and *Catwoman* (2004) are often unfairly cited as examples of why female-led superhero movies don't work, when in reality they were just terrible movies that strayed too far from the source material.







8 SPIDER-MAN 3
2007

Dir: Sam Raimi
Cast: Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, James Franco, Topher Grace

Too many cooks can spoil the broth. In *Spider-Man 3*'s case, it was an over-abundance of super villainy as Sandman (Thomas Haden Church), the second Green Goblin (James Franco) and a hastily crammed-in Venom (Topher Grace) vied for screen time with the web-slinger. And let us not forget *that* dance scene.

9 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2009

Dir: Gavin Hood
Cast: Hugh Jackman, Liev Schreiber, Lynn Collins, Ryan Reynolds

It's hard to know where to begin when starting a list of what made *Wolverine* such a failure: the filmmakers seemingly not knowing what a Wolverine actually is, memory-wiping adamantium bullets – there are some spectacularly stupid moments in Hugh Jackman's first solo outing in the *X-Men* film series. Gambit (Taylor Kitsch) is criminally underused, some of the better characters are killed off far too early and what kind of perverse mind sews up the Merc with a Mouth's cake hole? Possibly the best unintentional comedy of 2009 for the claw effects in the bathroom scene. Not even a naked Hugh Jackman can win this one back.

10 DR STRANGE
1978

Dir: Philip DeGuere Jr
Cast: Peter Hooten, Jessica Waltere

A plodding take on the lore of *Dr Strange* that changes his origins from a neurosurgeon on the path of redemption into a cocky psychiatrist with an eye for the ladies. Morgan Le Fay's master sends her on a mission to destroy the Sorcerer Supreme. The movie unsurprisingly wasn't picked up for a series, and has never officially been released on DVD.

ALSO SHOWING

11 GHOST RIDER: SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE
2012

Dirs: Mark Neveldine, Brian Taylor
Cast: Nicolas Cage, Ciarán Hinds, Idris Elba, Violante Placido

If you want to stare into the face of madness, watch Nicolas Cage's first transformation into the Ghost Rider. *Spirit Of Vengeance* picks up Johnny Blaze's story eight years later. The Rider is tasked with protecting a young boy – who asks all the important questions – from the Devil (Ciarán Hinds). Somehow makes the first film look good in comparison.



12 THE DEATH OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK
1990

Dir: Bill Bixby
Cast: Bill Bixby, Lou Ferrigno, Elizabeth Gracen

The last of *The Incredible Hulk* TV movies made with Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno as David Banner and his Hulk alter ego. Banner poses as a janitor to get close to a scientist who might be able to cure his condition. Although *The Incredible Hulk* retains a certain charm, the look and feel of the movies never left the Seventies. Banner character is killed off by the end.



13 NICK FURY: AGENT OF SHIELD
1998

Dir: Rod Hardy
Cast: David Hasselhoff, Lisa Rinna, Sandra Hess, Neil Roberts

The Nineties were a simpler time – a time when SHIELD's top man could be played by the bloke who sang *Looking For Freedom* and spent a sizeable chunk of the decade running in slow motion. For all the silliness you might associate with the Hoff, *Nick Fury: Agent Of SHIELD* is quite fun.



14 X-MEN: THE LAST STAND
2006

Dir: Brett Ratner
Cast: Hugh Jackman, Famke Janssen

If you're a fan of Chris Claremont's *The Dark Phoenix Saga*, chances are you left *The Last Stand* feeling disappointed. *X2* dropped plenty of hints about Jean Grey's growing powers. Sadly, the script reduced the Phoenix Force to a split personality, and poor Jean was relegated to throwing shade. The casting of Vinnie Jones as the Juggernaut baffles to this day.



15 BLADE: TRINITY
2004

Dir: David S Goyer
Cast: Wesley Snipes, Ryan Reynolds, Jessica Biel, Dominic Purcell

We have *Blade* and *X-Men* to thank for the comic movie revival that moved the genre away from dodgy production values, to Hollywood blockbuster. However, the final instalments of both series proved to be a mess. Their first mistake was giving super-badass loner Blade a crew, even if that does include Ryan Reynolds. He's not a people person, and never needed to be.



THREE MALIGNED MARVEL MOVIES WORTHY OF A SECOND CHANCE



PUNISHER: WAR ZONE
2008

Dir: Lexi Alexander
Cast: Ray Stevenson, Dominic West, Julie Benz, Wayne Knight, Colin Salmon

Ray Stevenson replaces Thomas Jane as Frank Castle in the reboot of *The Punisher*, in which Castle goes to war against disfigured mob boss Jigsaw (Dominic West). *Punisher: War Zone* is marred by clunky dialogue, but like the Dolph Lundgren version, its Eighties movie violence is simultaneously terrible and entertaining.



DAREDEVIL
2003

Dir: Mark Steven Johnson
Cast: Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Colin Farrell, Michael Clarke Duncan

Colin Farrell aside, this isn't as bad as you remember. Blind attorney by day, costumed vigilante by night, Daredevil is a different kind of hero. He's more conflicted than Batman, less gleeful than Spider-Man, and Ben Affleck inhabited the role well. Jennifer Garner showed promise – if only they'd given her a better solo film. The Director's Cut restores 30 minutes of material, and brings the film together much better than the theatrical release.



HULK
2003

Dir: Ang Lee
Cast: Eric Bana, Jennifer Connelly, Sam Elliott, Nick Nolte

It may not have worked, but at least Ang Lee was trying something different. Incorporating comic panels into the action sort of worked, but *Hulk* at least tried to flex a style muscle or two. Lee was over-ambitious in bringing too much psychodrama into a story about a big green angry dude, although the result was not quite as terrible as it's made out to be.

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INDIE SCI-FI THE SIGNAL SHOWS THAT THERE'S LIFE IN THE ALIEN-ABDUCTION GENRE YET. WE TALK TO DIRECTOR WILLIAM EUBANK ABOUT HOW TO MAKE A FESTIVAL FAVOURITE...

WORDS **JONATHAN HATFULL**



IT FEELS LIKE A LONG TIME SINCE WE'VE HAD A GOOD FILM THAT SHOWED HUMANITY MAKING CONTACT WITH ALIEN LIFE. WE'VE HAD BAD HORRORS, WORSE BLOCKBUSTERS AND OUR *X-Files* box sets, so William Eubank's smart, sensitive and beautifully shot *The Signal* comes as a welcome relief. It starts with a road trip, as Nic (Brenton Thwaites), Haley (Olivia Cooke) and Jonah (Beau Knapp) are travelling when they take a detour to find the house of a hacker. Following a shocking event, Nic wakes up in an underground facility where a man in a HAZMAT suit (Laurence Fishburne) tells him that they encountered an extraterrestrial – but why can't he leave?

Director and co-writer Eubank explains how he made his low budget work for him, keeping the audience guessing, and why good sci-fi is all about the people in it...



Director William Eubank had only good things to say about up-and-comer Brenton Thwaites (left).

AIM HIGH WITH YOUR LOW BUDGET

It's fair to say that sci-fi isn't necessarily the easiest genre to go for when you're working on an indie budget, but Eubank tells us that it helped him to streamline his concept. "Initially, I honestly wanted to make a sort of *Twilight Zone* movie," he remembers. "It wasn't like I was trying to create something that bends genres like it does, where it starts out as a drama and then gets more fantastic, but that's just where I naturally went.

"When you want to try to do something that has some big concepts or big ideas, but you don't have the world to spend, a lot of the time that works itself into your story, but hopefully in a way that maybe even improves the story."

FIND THE PERFECT CAST

It doesn't take long before you find yourself bonding with *The Signal*'s three leads. Well-written and very well performed, Nic, Haley and Jonah are easy to like and root for. "I got so lucky with all these kids," explains Eubank. "Olivia is just wonderful, Beau is wonderful, Brenton is wonderful. I could see that they're really good people, and I knew that they would be friends upon meeting each other."

Of course, the biggest star in the film is Fishburne, who brings his trademark gravitas to the role of Damon. "Honestly, I have no idea!" laughs Eubank when we ask how they got him. "We sent it to him, then I got a crazy call saying he had read it and loved it and was going to call me, and I couldn't believe it. I never in a million years would have thought that we could be fortunate enough to get him. In my mind he's a real sci-fi icon, and to have him express any sort of interest was amazing. To have this contrast between Brenton and Olivia and Beau, who are newer, mixing that with Laurence's experience was really fun to watch. Got really fortunate there!"

MAINTAIN THE MYSTERY

Although we're told by Damon that Nic might have encountered an alien life form, we're not really sure exactly what is going on. We know he's being held prisoner by some kind of authority, but we don't know how he got there, or what's happening to Hayley and Beau. The more teasing details we're given, the less clear it becomes.

"It's easy to write a mystery when you know what it is," laughs Eubank. "The trick is making sure people understand the titbits that they need to understand as you're experiencing it, and you really have to rely on your friends and other confidantes to help you distil that.

"You're like, 'Wait a second, is this going to be clear, or am I just out here on a limb?' You need to bounce it off a lot of other people to make sure you're getting the message across. I knew that people would be second-guessing it!"

MAKE IT LOOK GOOD

The Signal doesn't look like your average sci-fi movie. We start with our characters on the road. When Nic goes underground, those beautiful shots of stunning scenery are missed by both the character and the audience.

"I prescribe to the feeling that if I was able to take whatever movie I'm working on and turn it into a flipbook, not only do I want to feel like this thing changes and shifts narrative, but I want to make sure it feels colourful and alive," stresses Eubank. "I like my movies to have some colourfulness to them and at least strike you when you look at them. I was [working with] Nick Cassavetes, and he was like, 'My rule of thumb is whatever looks the best.' That's how you choose. Nobody will ever fault you."







CHOOSE YOUR INSPIRATIONS WISELY

There are some obvious touchstones for *The Signal*, but Eubank tells us that he looked beyond the genre he was working in for inspiration.

"There's a lot of homage to *THX*-type stuff in the facility and Kubrickian stuff. But even more so, I grew up watching *Dragon Ball Z*," he enthuses. "I loved anime growing up. The action is so powerful and well designed, and there is a really amazing usage of space. I've always been a big fan."

When it came to making sure the film had a heart, Eubank is quick to credit an American master. "I'm a huge fan of John Hughes films, it's not like I'm even remotely in the same realm or anything, or could hope to make films as great as he did, but I love his characters. I really like connecting with my characters in a way that I feel like they could be a friend of mine. When you get down to it, all of the characters have good hearts, and I've always appreciated that."

The Signal will be released in UK cinemas on 27 March.

HIGHLAND FLING



FANTASY ADAPTATION AND TUMBLR HIT OUTLANDER HAS THE MAKINGS OF A CULT CLASSIC WITH ITS SCOTLAND-SET TIME-TRAVEL ROMANCE. WE TALK TO CREATOR RONALD D MOORE, AUTHOR DIANA GABALDON, AND THE SERIES' STARS ABOUT THE SHOW'S JOURNEY TO THE MOTHERLAND...

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**
INTERVIEWS **STEVE NASH**



SCOTTISH 18TH CENTURY WARTIME TIME TRAVEL FICTION IS A PRETTY NICHE SUBJECT, WHICH IS PROBABLY WHY THE STARZ ORIGINAL SERIES

Outlander will never be the next *Game Of Thrones*. But with its obscure subject matter comes a loyal and cult-like following. *Outlander*'s first episode went out to 720,000 US viewers last summer, but eight episodes later, fans are completely hooked on the raunchy historical fantasy, and are eagerly awaiting the second part of Season One, soon to air in the UK on Amazon Prime.

Most of *Outlander*'s cult-like following seems to be made up of readers of American author Diana Gabaldon's novel series of the same name. Gabaldon wrote the first instalment, *Outlander*, in 1991, so the fanbase had been waiting for the TV show to come along for a good 24 years. Thankfully, the wait was worth it, judging by the steadily growing viewing figures and favourable reviews. Show creator Ronald D Moore – the mastermind behind *Battlestar Galactica*, *Caprica* and most recently *Helix* – insists that sticking closely to the books is what has led *Outlander* to become such a hit with Gabaldon fans.

"We sort of have the philosophy of we don't make changes unless we have to," he tells us. "And then, if we do, we always strive to get back to where the book was and sort of get back on the path. So you always have a guide of what you're trying to accomplish, and we have integrity to what the series is at this point. We've changed certain things. We've made certain adjustments. And so you are honour-bound to maintain the consistency of that going forward, especially for the audience that has never read the books, so they're just watching the show. So you're always trying to keep an eye on the book and keep an eye on what you've established in terms of continuity and mythology, and just keep moving forward."

As with the books, the show's first season follows World War II combat nurse Claire Randall (Caitriona Balfe), who finds herself accidentally transported through time to 1743 when she should be on her second honeymoon with her husband in Inverness. Waking up in the highlands smack-bang in the middle of a skirmish between Redcoats and Highlander rebels, she is rescued by a dashing kilted warrior called Jamie Fraser (Sam Heughan), and the two embark on a whirlwind romance.

Seeing her characters come to life a quarter of a century after they were created has been a treat for Gabaldon, and she's a big fan of the show's casting. "They've done beautifully," she says of Balfe and Heughan. "They are much, much better than I ever thought they'd be. I was amazed when I saw their first audition tapes. In fact, I wrote to Ron[ald D Moore] and to his production partner, Meril [Davis], and I said, 'Oh my God. I didn't believe this was actually possible. You found him.' And it was just fantastic."

Balfe insists that playing Claire has changed her as a person. "Just in terms of getting through this amazing undertaking of putting so much time into the show and every day showing up and playing this really strong, very resilient character, I think it showed me how much strength and resilience I have. You don't go through something like that without sort of realising, 'Wow, that's a big achievement,' and you grow from that. So I think, if anything, Claire's either brought my inner strength out or shown me that I'm maybe stronger than I thought I was previously."

Strangely, Heughan thinks the same of his relationship with Jamie. "You know the kind of rough arc of the character and where we're going to go, and we've obviously read the books," he tells us. "But until you've actually lived that moment and discovered what that moment is, you never quite know fully what the character is. Then you bring yourself to the part, so it all reflects back into your personal life as well.

"I think in the second part of the season, you discover a lot more about Jamie. He's kind of finding his place in the world. He's got new responsibilities. He's got to deal with relationships that he would rather not deal with, [like] with his sister and with his personal relationship with his dead father. And we start to see the stubborn side of his pride. So he's less of the sort of idealistic man in the second part of the season, and we start seeing his failings or the chinks in the armour. And yeah, I mean, I guess all that stuff with relationships, [you see that] he's very honourable and he learns a lot."



Caitriona Balfe plays Claire, who is separated from her fiancee Frank (Tobias Menzies).



In the past, Claire comes into contact with highland warrior Jamie (Sam Heughan).

Balfe and Heughan have another challenge coming up in during the back end of Season One, as the show approaches the infamous 'spanking' incident. The scene, which can be found in book one of the series, features Jamie whipping Claire with his sword belt by way of punishment, and has prompted much discussion among readers. It's a difficult topic to tackle on the screen, but Balfe believes it's handled in the best possible taste.

"I think we all knew a lot of people would be interested in seeing how we would tackle it," she tells us. "But you know, first and foremost, we have to remember this: you have to look at it in the mind frame of 1743. It's very hard, as a modern person, to see that this is okay under any circumstance; but in 1743, this was a very justified form of punishment that a husband would mete out. But we [didn't want to] take it lightly. We wanted to approach it very respectfully. And we talked a lot about it. We met a few times. We choreographed it quite well. And, yeah, when it came to the day, we just tried to give it the respect it deserved.

"She finds it very hard to wrap her mind around this man that she's fallen in love with, what he's about to do. There's so much disbelief in the beginning. In the context of their marriage, they had to figure out a way to get past this. And I think it was really important that, even though she may not have been able to accept what he did, there had to be a coming to an understanding of his reasons for it, and that really allowed her to find a way to forgive him."

"I think, ultimately, Jamie, whether or not he believes it's the right thing to do, he just knows he has to do it to teach her a lesson, and that's the way he's been brought up," adds Heughan. "They both learn a lesson about their relationship. He comes to her and declares that he will never do it again. So to go through that whole experience strengthens their relationship and moves it forward."

> "IT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT THAT, EVEN THOUGH SHE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACCEPT WHAT HE DID, THERE HAD TO BE AN UNDERSTANDING OF HIS REASONS"
> CAITRIONA BALFE



AS WELL AS THE HISTORICALLY ACCURATE spanking – or 'tawsing' as it's called in the books – *Outlander* is aided by plenty of experts on all things Scottish to consult the show into authenticity heaven.

"We actually have a variety of consultants on the show," says Moore. "There's a full-time historian who gets all of the scripts, and we consult with [them] at the script level. There are also technical consultants that work with costume, with set design, language coaches and dialect coaches and herbologists for the medicine. We'll bring in medical technicians on the day to do things with bandages and splints and that sort of thing. In terms of how the actors wear their costumes, that's pretty much left up to the costume department and their interaction with the actors. And I believe there's a significant amount of freedom for the Highlanders how each of them wears the specific kilt and what they are comfortable in."

"Terry [Dresbach, the show's costume designer] has obviously done a fantastic job with the costumes, but we've kind of got our own freedom to express ourselves as well," says Heughan. "Nothing is set in stone, especially at that time period. But we've also got these amazing extras in the show that are part of Clanranald [an educational organisation that promotes increased awareness of Scottish culture], and I always feel kind of sorry for them at break time or at tea time when they are all marched off in rank and file. They've really lived this for us, and it's fantastic. So when you are on set, the Redcoats are acting like a regiment, or the Highlanders are there setting fire to things. Clanranald, they are a group of re-enactors that live in the area, and they live and breathe this stuff,



There will be a lot here for fans of the books to enjoy.

both the Highlanders and the Redcoats, and they've built a fort… that we went and visited once, and so we do depend on them to bring authenticity to a lot of the background players and provide texture and detail."

This authenticity happily extends all the way to the Scottish landscapes, as the show is often filmed on location in the Highlands. Scottish culture is so deep-rooted in the story and the characters that it seems ridiculous to film *Outlander* anywhere else.

"I think it's so vital that we are there in Scotland," Balfe says. "It informs everything that we do. You know, the landscape is so beautiful. The places that we go to shoot, the castles or the different locations, they add just so much texture to the show. And, you know, yeah, it's cold. It's rainy. But that's the way it is there. I think that just adds a great realism to it, and I never complain."



Outlander will be available to stream on Amazon Prime Instant Video later this year.

OUT OF KILT-ER

Scotland has played home to many a sci-fi/fantasy tale. Here's a visitor's guide…



Summerisle

THE WICKER MAN (1973)

The island once earned a pittance through fishing and sheep farming, until Lord Summerisle turned the inhabitants onto crops and paganism.



DunBroch

BRAVE (2012)

Merida and the rest of the DunBroch Clan reside in the fictitious and somewhat magical land of their namesake in the Scottish Highlands.



Muir Island

X-MEN COMICS (1977-)

Muir Island, founded by Dr Moira MacTaggert, is the home of Earth's largest and most comprehensive mutant research centre.



Hogsmeade

HARRY POTTER (2001-11)

Home of Hogwarts, The Three Brooksticks and Madam Puddifoot's, Hogsmeade village is located somewhere between Dufftown and Achintee, and is the only all wizard settlement in Britain.



Glencoe

HIGHLANDER (1986)

Connor MacLeod settles in Glencoe in 1541 with his new wife, but their peaceful Highland life is interrupted by a visit from Juan Sánchez Villa-Lobos Ramírez.



Loch Ness

LOCH NESS (1996)

When a disgruntled university tutor travels to Scotland to continue his deceased colleague's research on the Loch Ness Monster, sighting Nessy will either make or break him.



Blackness Castle

DOOMSDAY (2008)

After the Reaper Virus causes most of the Scottish population to turn savage, a scientist starts his own colony of uninfected medieval knights in Blackness Castle.



Glasgow

PERFECT SENSE (2011)

As an epidemic that causes loss of sensory perception begins to spread throughout the globe, a chef and an epidemiologist from Glasgow meet and fall in love.



DEATH WATCH (2002)

When a TV company tries to film a terminally ill woman's last days alive, she is forced to flee her home in Glasgow and go on the run.



Edinburgh

OUTCAST (2010)

A beast stalks a mother and her son in an outlying district of Edinburgh while they try to protect themselves with Celtic magic.



UNDER THE SKIN (2013)

An alien in a human costume travels around Glasgow in a white van and picks up unsuspecting, horny men to take back to her lair.



Hadrian's Wall

BLACKADDER: BACK & FORTH (1999)

After several disastrous attempts to travel in time, Blackadder and Baldrick land in Roman Britain, where they see Blackadder's centurion ancestor and Roman-era Baldrick guarding Hadrian's Wall.

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I HEAR VOICES

WE SPEAK TO MARJANE SATRAPI ABOUT HER ENGLISH-LANGUAGE DEBUT WITH THE STRANGEST KILLER OF THE YEAR

WORDS **JONATHAN HATFULL**

FRENCH-IRANIAN FILMMAKER MARJANE SATRAPI'S COMING-OF-AGE AUTOBIOGRAPHY PERSEPOLIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST BELOVED GRAPHIC NOVELS OF the last decade. Her 2007 film, based on the book, was met with similar acclaim. Now, she's made her English-language debut in decidedly different territory. *The Voices* is a serial-killer movie starring Hollywood heartthrob Ryan Reynolds as Jerry Hickfang, a single but cheery factory worker who is compelled to kill women and store them in his fridge by his cat, Mr Whiskers, although his dog, Bosco, disapproves. As well as being a serial-killer movie, it's also a dark comedy – and a love story, and a tragedy. In fact, it's a bit of everything put together.

"Yeah!" laughs Satrapi. "It's a little bit of a romantic comedy, it's a comedy but not really, a horror film but not really, a drama but not really, and all of that at the same time. I think it looks much more like a patchwork than a unilateral colour kind of thing, but life is a patchwork, life is up and down. I think we have to say, if you want to meet the loveliest, nicest serial killer in the world, go and watch this movie! I don't know, if it's me and I had to go and watch a film that makes me scared and makes me laugh and everything, I will go and watch this movie. Really, I made the movie that I wanted to go and watch."

This strange but utterly engaging tonal mixture might seem like a drastic change, but pinning down a theme in Satrapi's work isn't an easy task. Following *Persepolis*, Satrapi moved into live action in 2011, adapting her tragi-comic graphic novel *Chicken With Plums* before making crime comedy *The Gang Of The Jotas* in 2012. Throughout this genre hopping, her sense

of humour remains constant, as does a willingness to subvert preconceived ideas, one of which being the fact that we shouldn't like a serial killer.

"The script was really talking a lot to me," she enthuses. "I read it in the night, I was like, 'What the fuck is that?' And in the morning I was like, 'How do I love the serial killer so much? I love this character, and how am I going to do it?' It's one thing to say that you like a serial killer, but then it's another thing to make people like him. 'Okay, now show it to us how you're going to make it work!' That was very challenging, so therefore I was very, very interested in doing it."

In addition to being Satrapi's English-language debut, it's also the first film that she hasn't written. She tells us that working from someone else's idea proved to be both liberating and inspiring. "To tell you the truth, when you write a script yourself, it's a very comfortable loan, because you know everything, you know all the details," she explains. "Also, since you have written it, it's very difficult to have enough distance to see what actually works and what doesn't. When a script comes to me, I see much easier what works, what can we improve, and what can we do.

"I have to not only make an adaptation of the work from literature to image, but before that, I have to adopt a thing, and when I adopt it, it really becomes mine, and I really cherish it and I invest myself into it, like if I wrote it myself." As for making a film in English, Satrapi tells us that the challenges were not too serious. "You don't think that my English is so bad, do you?" she laughs. "English is not a language that I speak naturally because English is a language that I have learned by watching movies. I have never properly studied any English in my life. At the beginning I was like, 'Me hungry, Me thirsty', and little by little it gets more sophisticated because you practice it. It's a little bit challenging because it is my third language, but at the same time I think I speak it well enough to make myself understood, and also to judge the quality of the work of the others, know what they are doing, and understand what they say."

Collaboration was crucial on *The Voices*. With such a strange tonal mix, it was vital that everybody be on the same page, from the stars to the set designers. Despite her background in various artistic forms, Satrapi tells us that she was always open to suggestions. "I don't say to people, 'I am a painter and you're going to have to do what I want.' It's really like, 'Oh, I like this and I like that.'" Although she tells us that Reynolds was not the first actor who came to mind when she was reading the script, she tells us that she was struck by how they shared a vision for the film and amiable lunatic Jerry.

"You can have the best director in this world joined with the best actor in this world – if each of them wants to make a different movie, the result cannot be good," she explains to us. "It's very important that the director and the main actor have the same vision. Not only did he have exactly the same vision; we really approached it from the same way. Then looking at him, he had these dark, very profound creepy eyes that look really scary, and at the same time he has this juvenile smile that makes you want to give him anything. You're like, 'Come on Jerry, you can cut my throat with a knife, it's not a problem, come kill me! Go ahead man, I love you anyway!'"

MUCH AS REYNOLDS DOESN'T MAKE FOR YOUR TYPICAL SERIAL KILLER, THE WOMEN OF THE VOICES DON'T SEEM LIKE YOUR TYPICAL VICTIMS.

Alongside *Byzantium*'s Gemma Arterton as Jerry's crush Fiona, the film stars two Oscar nominees: *Pitch Perfect*'s Anna Kendrick as a fellow co-worker with a crush on Jerry, and *Animal Kingdom*'s Jacki Weaver as his therapist. "I wanted to have different kind of women, because in this kind of film you always have this big blonde girl who is about 40 pounds. She's the victim and you can just take her little finger and break her in two," explains Satrapi. "I wanted to have different women, and not the same blonde girl who is going to be cut into pieces."

That determination to subvert serial-killer tropes extends to the look of the film. *The Voices* is a joyfully colourful movie, full of idiosyncratic details, from the pink factory overalls to the heart-shaped piece of pepperoni on a pizza slice Jerry devours. "My background comes from painting," Satrapi explains. "I have a very, very strict relationship with colour and frames. If I don't have exactly the pink that I want I can really become mad. I have some very obsessive stuff with how the image looks. I watch a movie and I'm like, 'Oh, the movie was so good, but it was so ugly.'

"I hate it when movies are ugly, and I have a sense of taste that is mine. So when they said, 'Describe the fantastic world of Jerry,' I describe what seems the nicest to me. I say to myself, 'The overalls are pink.' So you can say, 'Okay, this is odd,' but at the same time it's a bathtub factory, so obviously you're talking about shampoo and bath gel and bubbles and flowers and pink! And pink overalls don't have a connotation because nobody used it before, and I love pink, because I'm a girl! And then little by little you create this visual style."

The film has touches of David Lynch about it, as well as nods towards serial-killer classics like *Psycho* and *The Silence Of The Lambs*, but Satrapi tells us that











Ryan Reynolds stars as loveable serial killer Jerry in *The Voices*.

"IT'S ONE THING TO LIKE A SERIAL KILLER, BUT ANOTHER TO MAKE PEOPLE LIKE HIM"
MARJANE SATRAPI

she was careful to avoid direct references wherever possible. "I watched all the movies that I thought could have a parallel with this to try to not copy the visual style," she remembers. "Because that's not fun. They always make homages, but homage is a nice way to say you have copied the work of the other one. I don't want to, but at the same time, you know, really after Orson Welles and Stanley Kubrick, what do you want to invent in cinema?"

It's easy to look at the stylistic flourishes present in *The Voices* and draw a line back to Satrapi's background as a visual artist. However, she tells us that she's not interested in falling prey to categorisation. "Well, you make *Persepolis* and people tell you, 'You are an animator', and I'm like, 'I'm no [Hayao] Miyazaki', I only made one film in animation, because for me animation is not a genre; it's just a way of making films. I could not do [*Persepolis*] another way."

Speaking to Satrapi, it's clear that it's the medium of film in general that she loves, rather than a specific type of cinema. "Americans like to say, 'Oh, cinema is a question of storytelling,'" she tells us. "But I don't think it's so much a question of storytelling; it's a question of language. If you have the same film made by five different people, you have five different movies. So my research is more to find my own language. At the same time I am a very good spectator. Even though this is my work now, I really get into a film and I get scared, I shout, and I cry, I am like as if it is 1920 again and I have never seen a movie before! When I see a good movie I just want to make movies, and when I see a bad one I just want to stop, and I feel like dying."

Indeed, following the drastic change of *The Voices*, Satrapi is keen to keep pushing herself and trying new things. She's working on two potential new projects at the moment, but won't tell us what they are. "I am extremely superstitious, in a sick way, so I'm scared that if I say it to you it won't happen!"

However, whatever she does next, it will be something new. She is determined to keep pushing herself and exploring new genres. "It's not so much that I want to surprise people; I'm easily bored by everything," she tells us. "I do something, and then I want to do something else, because I don't have so much time left to me. I'm not going to live another 4,000 years. So you know, I have a couple of years, I can make like a dozen films maximum, so if I could try all different styles of film before I die, I don't want to have any regrets. I don't want to say, 'Shit, I wanted to make a musical; why didn't I do it?' That's probably the hardest of all of them, because my god, everything has to be synchronised and everything has to be perfect. So I would love to do one!"

The Voices will be released in cinemas on 20 March.



Gemma Arterton plays the film's first doomed co-star...



...along with the hopefully less ill-fated Anna Kendrick.

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The Voices (2015)
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2 HEDWIG
Harry Potter (2001-10)
A young witch or wizard needs to have a faithful animal companion, and few prove more loyal than Harry Potter's beloved Hedwig. See her risk her life to... oh dear. Look away, children.



3 BLOOD
A Boy And His Dog (1975)
When you find yourself in the post-apocalyptic desert wastelands, it certainly helps to have a dog that can locate women by sense of smell and tell you via telepathy!



4 CHURCH
Pet Sematary (1989)
Church might look like your average, massively unfriendly cat, but this furry fiend has actually come back from the dead. Don't try to pet him, though. Sometimes, dead is better.



5 NAZI MONKEY
Raiders Of The Lost Ark (1981)
This highly trained Capuchin monkey might seem friendly and sympathetic, but be warned: she is in fact a Nazi agent, and reports back nightly to her fascist master! She is a bit greedy, though.



6 INGA
Phenomena (1985)
Inga has spent years caring for her master, ailing entomologist John McGregor. She has learned about the dangers of sharp objects, so if she needs to take revenge, rest assured: she knows how to get it.



7 DUG
Up (2009)
Dug might seem like an ordinary dog, and, well, he is. However, the use of a special collar means that he can communicate his thoughts to his human masters. Admittedly, it's mostly his name.



8 SHARK
Deep Blue Sea (1999)
Pets? Maybe not, but these sharks have been genetically engineered to increase their brain size to create a cure for Alzheimer's... or something. They definitely won't escape and eat us all.





HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

WE SPOKE TO HOME STAR JIM PARSONS AND PRODUCER SUZANNE BUIRGY ABOUT HIS ROLE AS A CUDDLY EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE SHARING A MICROPHONE WITH A POP STAR...

WORDS **KRYSTAL SIM**

WHILE HIS CHARACTER ON THE BIG BANG THEORY HAS BEEN JOKINGLY COMPARED TO AN ALIEN, ACTOR JIM Parsons doesn't think Sheldon would take too well to his latest, optimistic character – a charming little alien called Oh.

"Sheldon would be very frightened of this character. I think that he would not take any comfort at all in knowing that there were tiny purple creatures who speak in broken English out in the universe."

Home, DreamWorks' latest film, tells the story of lovable misfit Oh. He belongs to an alien race called the Boov – led by the swaggering yet cowardly Captain Smek (Steve Martin), on the run from their fearsome foes, the Gorg.

"They change homes because they keep being discovered," explains Parsons. "They finally discover Earth, and think it will be a wonderful place to hide, so they start an invasion."

Believing humans to be no better than pests, these benevolent invaders blithely relocate the population and take over the planet. But when an over-enthusiastic Oh hits 'send all' on the e-vite to his housewarming party, he inadvertently gives away the Boov's location to their mortal enemy.

Faced with being 'erased' by his own kind, Oh runs away and meets a young human girl who escaped capture – Rihanna as Gratuity 'Tip' Tucci, a young woman on a mission to find her mother.

Oh agrees to help Tip track her down, and transforms her car into a turbo-charged flying contraption using a convenience-store slushy machine.

"She is mad at his species because they've stolen her mother from her," says Parsons. "They end up in a flying car travelling around Earth together. Tip discovers that he is not 'bad' like she thought he was, and Oh discovers that she is not the crass simpleton he was taught she was supposed to be."

The film is adapted from the children's book *The True Meaning Of Smekday* by writer and illustrator Adam Rex. While the design and characters are true to the spirit of the source material, the film has veered in a different direction. The improbable friendship between Oh and Tip follows a great tradition of alien-child bonding, from *ET* to *Lilo & Stitch*.

"What Oh is that makes him different from the others is curious," producer Suzanne Buirgy says, "and that leads him to want to engage with others. It's just not what that species does – they don't find value in it. Oh tries so hard that he goofs up and makes mistakes, and that's not very appealing to the other Boov, who don't want to stick out.

"We wanted Oh to be adorable and a bit clueless. There's something innocent about Jim. I saw him do *Harvey* on Broadway; he can make a character like that so loveable, and he has that unique speaking voice. We began to put him together with Oh – there was no one else we could imagine doing it."

Both characters have preconceived notions about the other, and the Texan actor was drawn to how the story challenges those prejudices.

"I really wanted to do an animated film," he says, "and the more I heard about this story, the more I liked it and wanted to be a part of it. I was charmed by this whole idea of naturally discovering what other people are and

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seeing what unlikely friendships can happen in the process. The director, Tim Johnson (*Antz*), had such clarity of vision… Without that guidance I would have been too scared to take two steps."

Playing a cartoonish quasi-conqueror is a world away from the live-action comedy that Parsons is most famous for in *The Big Bang Theory*. He says recording lines with only his imagination for inspiration was liberating.

"It was so different. There's something freeing about it, because you're not working with anybody else except for the director. There are no actors, there's no set. You can't even use your body to tell the story. It was one of the most creative experiences I've ever had. If you didn't see it in your head, you didn't see it at all."

If the purple tentacles weren't alien enough, the Boov also have a rather strange way of speaking. Parsons felt the challenge lay in making things clear for the audience. "Oh has a kind of broken English way of speaking. It's English by way of Alien, and because of that I would be self-correcting phrases as I tried to do it. And they'd be like, 'There's a wrong way that's actually the right way for Oh to say it.'

> "I REALLY WANTED TO DO AN ANIMATED FILM. THE MORE I HEARD ABOUT THIS STORY, THE MORE I LIKED IT AND WANTED TO BE A PART OF IT"
> JIM PARSONS

"He's a very optimistic and eager character, and that kind of dictates a certain energy and tone that went through the whole thing. But more than anything, I felt dictated by the idea of trying to keep things clear. These are new characters, in a new story. I think it's very important if you're going to fall in love with them, which I think people will, to understand very clearly what's going on and what's being set up."

RAMPIMG UP THE RIDICULOUSNESS IS COMEDIAN STEVE MARTIN, WHO PLAYS THE BOOV'S LEADER, CAPTAIN SMEK. HIS TALENTS INCLUDE RUNNING AWAY, taking credit for everything and bopping minions on the head with his staff, 'The Shusher.' The iconic actor made quite the impression on his colleagues.

"I got to spend a couple of voice sessions with him," says Parsons, "and not only is he very kind and intelligent; he has this ability to colourfully fly off of any topic and keep going, which was heaven for the writers and animators.

"It's very different from what I do. I love working with scripts – I take great pride in that. But I don't have that same sort of free spirit that he does. There's a fearlessness, years of practice of it have made him even better. He dives into the most unknown territory with such brazen abandon, and it's amazing to watch."

"If you're in the presence of Steve Martin, you're in awe," adds Buirgy. "He's so unassuming. And then he pulls this stuff up out of this place that is this Steve Martin place, and it's unbelievable. Tons of what he did was improvised. He went off on a whole story about how he ran from the Gorg, and it went on for ten minutes. We could hardly move for laughing so hard."

DreamWorks CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg thought Rihanna would be perfect while listening to her music. Buirgy, herself a songwriter and performer, felt that the singer's authenticity and infectious laugh helped bring Tip to life.

"I spent a couple of sessions with her," recalls Parsons, "and I'm like, 'Oh my god, I'm on her home turf.' There was something so natural about seeing her in front of a mic that made me feel so homeless. But she is so incredibly warm and self-deprecating that it's been a joy to spend time with her."

Rihanna's lead role as Tip is also a step forward in the representation of women of colour in animation. Buirgy tells us they wanted to make her character special.

"We wanted to make [Tip] unique and to be a model for a lot of kids; kids who come from mixed backgrounds and are melting-pot kids. She is brave, feisty, and she is not going to let anybody get in her way. She starts off closed and she opens up."

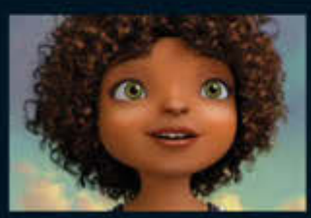
Home is about searching for a place to belong. Buirgy hopes that those who see it will embrace its message that no matter how much of an outsider you may feel, you'll find a friend.



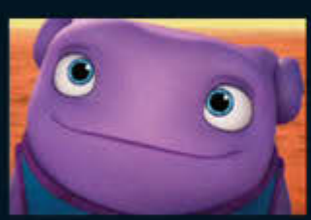
The two leads are voiced by Jim Parsons and Rihanna, both in animation for the first time.



Home is adapted from Adam Rex's *The True Meaning Of Smekday.*







"I hope they'll take away that it's okay to be different, and that we all feel odd and out of place," she says. "And if we look to each other and really think about how someone else might be feeling, that we can be compassionate and understanding to each other."

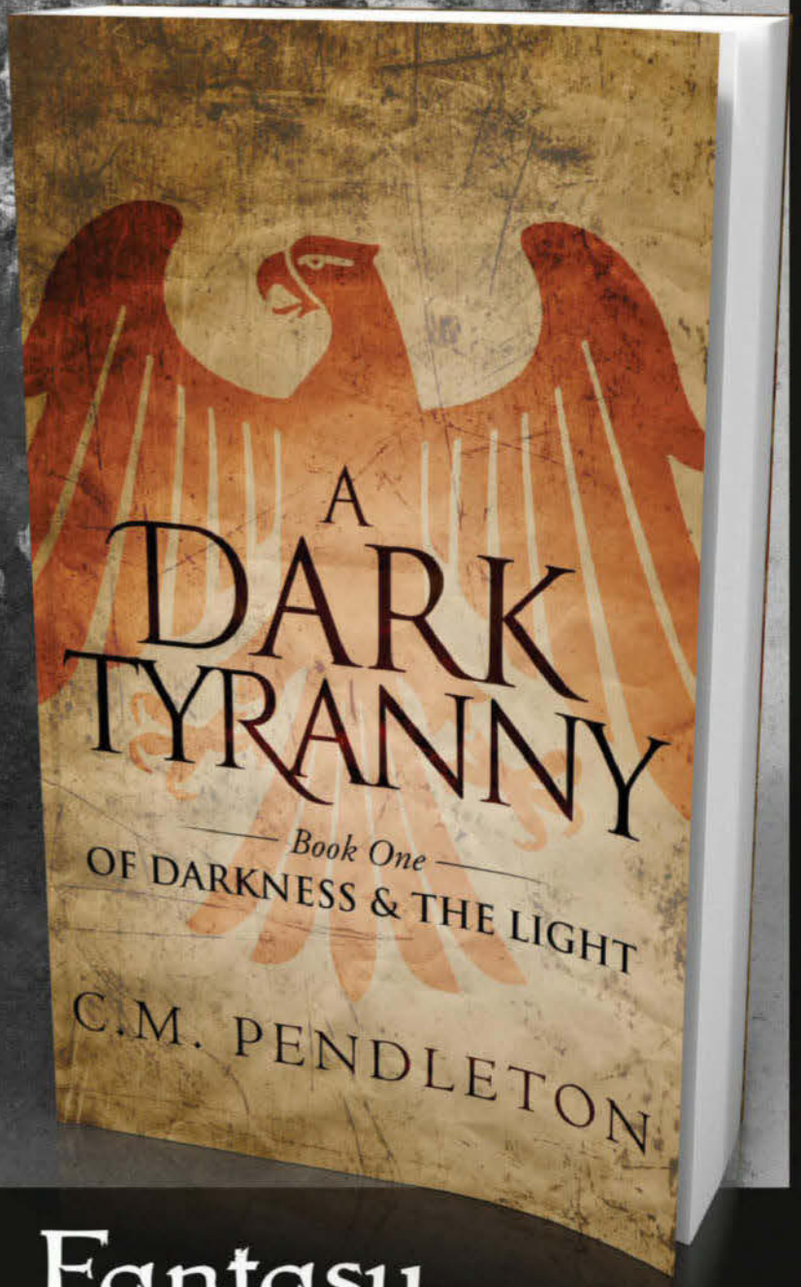
"They're both searching for things that they no longer have," agrees Parsons. "They find this common ground and discover someone else who sees the world similarly, and it allows them to be themselves.

"I think anybody can relate to that feeling, wanting to find a group to belong to. That eagerness and enthusiasm for life that Oh has, I try to feel that more often. It's rather contagious in a way, his embracing of everything that comes his way was very sweet. It's a lovely way to live."

Home will be released in cinemas on 20 March.

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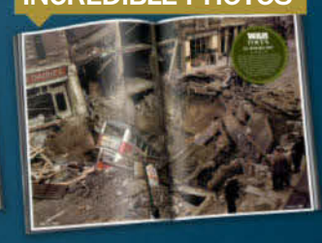
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Our th[illegible]s on the pick [illegible]ment [illegible]s month

★★★★★ Outstanding ★★★★ Thoroughly entertaining ★★★ Good but somewhat lacking [illegible]as you should *The Rendlesham UFO Incident*



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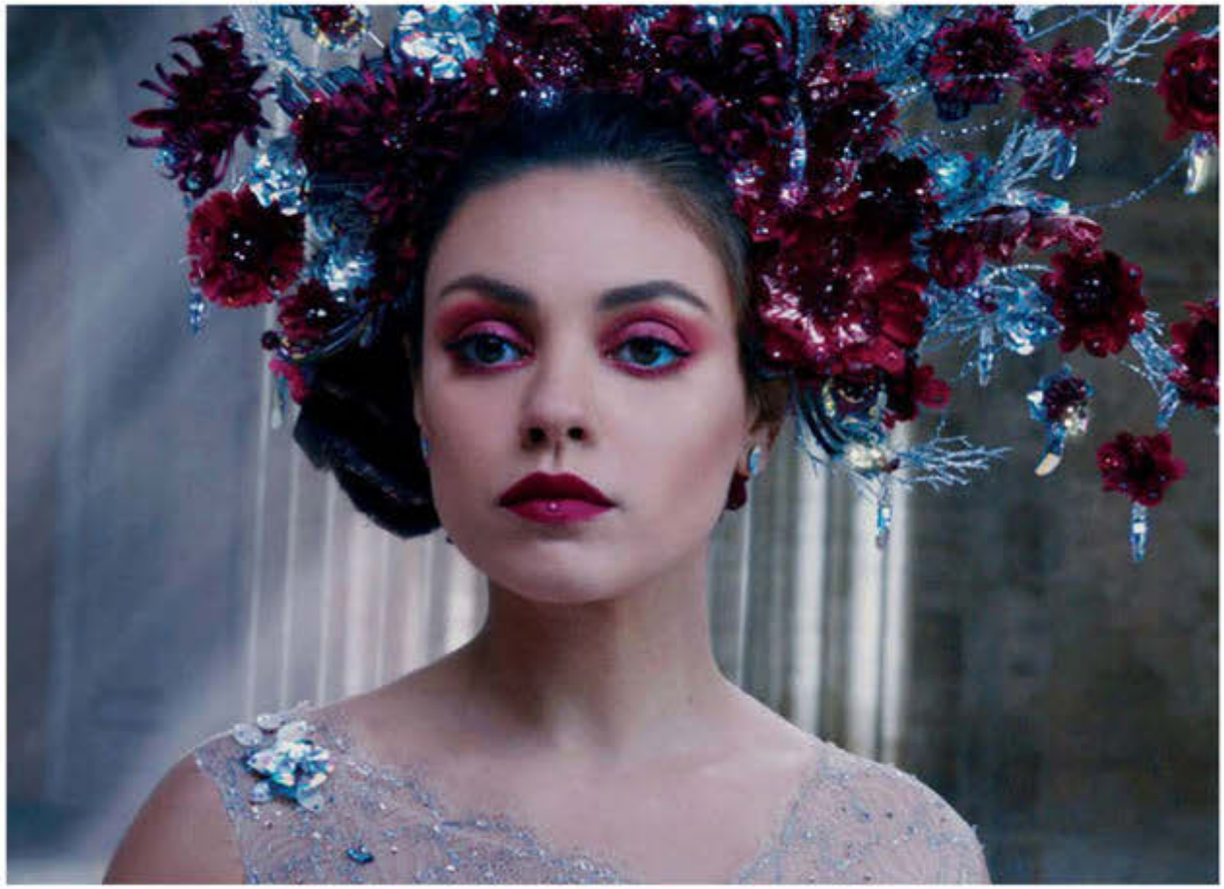
70 JUPITER ASCENDING

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TRIVIA MILA KUNIS REPLACED *BLACK SWAN* CO-STAR NATALIE PORTMAN IN THE LEAD ROLE OF JUPITER JONES.



FILM INFO

Released
Out now
Certificate
12A
Directors
Andy and Lana Wachowski
Screenwriters
Andy and Lana Wachowski
Cast
Mila Kunis, Channing Tatum, Sean Bean, Eddie Redmayne, Tuppence Middleton, Douglas Booth
Distributor
Warner Bros
Running Time
127 mins



JUPITER ASCENDING

Unyielding but unremarkable

The synopsis for *Jupiter Ascending* reads like a textbook, good old-fashioned space opera: Jupiter Jones (Mila Kunis) is a down-on-her-luck caretaker who hates her life and wants to escape. After discovering she is space royalty and just a few bureaucratic procedures away from inheriting Earth, she sets off on a high-octane quest through the galaxy, accompanied by genetically mutated wolf man Caine Wise (Channing Tatum), to claim what is rightfully hers.

But before Jupiter can become the literal Miss World, she and Caine must deal with Balem (Eddie Redmayne), Kalique (Tuppence Middleton) and Titus (Douglas Booth), a trio of immortal siblings of the House of Abrasax, who each believe they are also in the running as Earth's heir.

As the Wachowskis' first non-adapted film since *The Matrix Revolutions* in 2003, we were expecting big things from it. Unfortunately, it's not the timeless space epic it could have been. Before nitpicking, you must understand that it's pure sci-fi and pure fun. Two hours of non-stop universe traversing, kick-ass visual effects and insanely awesome gadgets (Caine's anti-gravity boots trump Marty McFly's self-lacing trainers in 'things we so badly want to be real') makes for a good time, no matter what kind of prior experience you have with space operas.

It's worth watching if you're into that sort of thing, but maybe just the one time. It's not the type of film that warrants detailed analysis, expanded universes or even a sequel. The story is fun, but pretty basic. It's got a beginning, middle and end, with limited surprises and standout moments. And if we are all being totally honest here, it takes a bit of time to wrap the story up. Sure, it's exactly the same length as *The Empire Strikes Back* and shorter than *Return Of The Jedi*, but 127 minutes of non-stop space capers gets tiring pretty quickly. The ending could have taken place much sooner without detracting from the story.

Aside from the stunning visual effects – in places, they really are something special – the characters are easily *Jupiter Ascending*'s strongest point. Kunis makes a brilliant lead, which is not necessarily surprising. Though some of her dialogue is a little clunky at times, she's funny and charming, and reacts the way you'd expect you would act if you found yourself in her situation.

Basically, she's believable, which doesn't often happen with female-led science fiction. She's not massively bad-ass – the only training she's had was janitorial,



which likely didn't teach how to execute a high kick or strangle your assailant to death using nothing but your thighs. But she gives it her best go, whacking her movie showdown sparring partner over the head with a pole.

There aren't any jaw-dropping performances, but that's fine and unsurprising (again, space opera); it's just good, spacey fun. The Abrasax siblings are all suitably creepy and mysterious. Middleton's elegant but conniving Kalique and Booth's smooth playboy Titus are intriguing, with their intentions hidden behind masks. Redmayne is also a scene stealer, mainly because he maintains a gravely, breathless voice throughout and permanently looks as if he's trying not to cry. It's difficult to decide whether it makes his performance cool and alien or just a bit weird, but it's easy to forget about it.

The amusing dialogue, interesting, three-dimensional characters and just how darn spacey and fun it all is makes *Jupiter Ascending* one to watch and enjoy, but ultimately forget about once you've seen something better.

Poppy-Jay Palmer
VERDICT ★★★☆☆

NOT ONLY HUMAN

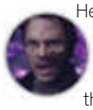
The best of the part-human, part-alien race

Laura
***Under The Skin* (2013)**

Scarlett Johansson's mysterious alien could easily pass as human, if it wasn't for all the 'dissolving men into the floor' stuff.

Wikus Van De Merwe
***District 9* (2009)**

Wikus is what happens when people get exposed to alien chemicals, and human DNA fuses with 'prawn' DNA.

Peter Quill
***Guardians Of The Galaxy* (2014)**

He thought he was just an Eighties Earth kid, but Star-Lord's secret ancient alien ancestry helped him save the galaxy.

Mr Spock
***Star Trek* (2009)**

He acts like any logical Vulcan would, but Spock inherited his mother's humanity, even if he won't admit it.

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Cloud Atlas
The Wachowskis' journey through time rather than space is overly complicated, but still pretty fun.

TRIVIA CHANNING TATUM WORE A MOUTHPIECE DURING FILMING TO CHANGE THE SHAPE OF HIS LOWER JAW, WHICH MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO TALK OR CLOSE HIS MOUTH.



PROJECT ALMANAC

Your kids are gonna love it...

Details 12A //106 mins //Outnow **Director** Dean Israelite **Screenwriters** Andrew Deutschman, Jason Harry Pagan **Cast** Jonny Weston, Sofia Black-D'Elia, Sam Lerner, Allen Evangelista **Distributor** Paramount



Dean Israelite's first feature film is an entertaining and confident found-footage, time-travel movie that recalls the chats and dilemmas of Shane Carruth's low-budget film *Primer*, which made waves in the indie scene over ten years ago. However, complicated scientific matters are soon dropped to focus on the teen experience, which renders it a far less intelligent effort than Carruth's aforementioned gem.

When MIT applicant David Raskin (Jonny Weston) finds out he's been accepted to his dream college, his jubilation disappears as soon as he realises that his request for a grant has been denied. With his dreams of scientific study slipping from his grasp, he investigates the attic space where his late father's inventions are kept to find a solution to his problem. Instead, he finds a video camera that holds evidence to not only prove time travel is possible, but that he may have the means to make it a reality.



David recruits his film-obsessed little sister to document his experiment and two closest friends to join him on a quest to the unknown. Classmate Jessie (Sofia Black-D'Elia) turns up as a love interest for David after she accidentally stumbles into their lab.

The screenwriters display a fondness for the time-travel genre, and have lots of fun with it, but don't really deliver anything outstanding. There are direct nods to *Looper* and *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, and the title even alludes to the *Back To The Future* franchise, but with that also comes an air of predictability as the cause and effect storyline kicks in towards the latter half. However, the responsibility of time-travel crashing down around David does play nicely into his narrative.

It is a shame, then, that at points the noticeable product placement and 'your mum' jokes threaten to sour the film. In addition to that, despite David's sister being a whizz with a video camera, she is often landed with lines which suggest she is dumb and clueless.

Katherine McLaughlin
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Primer
Extremely smart time-travel film that may perplex but also proves fascinating to watch unfold.



THE SIGNAL

Close encounters

Details 15 // 97 mins // 27 March **Director** William Eubank **Screenwriters** Carlyle Eubank, William Eubank, David Frigerio **Cast** Brenton Thwaites, Olivia Cooke, Beau Knapp, Laurence Fishburne **Distributor** Entertainment One



We've had what feels like a long run of terrible alien abduction horror movies recently, so William Eubank's thoughtful and tender portrayal of an extraterrestrial encounter feels like something of a reprieve. Admittedly, we have had to wait some time to see it (it has had very good word of mouth from its festival run), but it's a relief to say that it's worth the wait.

Nic (Brenton Thwaites) is driving across country with his girlfriend Haley (Olivia Cooke) and best friend Jonah (Beau Knapp) when they come across what could be the home address of a hacker who has been tormenting them. They decide to take a detour and surprise the guy, but the house in the middle of nowhere has a surprise for them. When Nic wakes up, he's in an underground facility where Damon (Laurence Fishburne), a scientist in a Hazmat suit, tells him he may have encountered extraterrestrial life.

The Signal is a nifty sci-fi thriller that makes the most of its limited location, turning a likeable road movie about a young guy struggling with the early stages of MS and an impending break-up into a tense puzzle. The plot kicks into gear once Nic wakes up underground, but Eubank ensures our involvement in his story with great casting and beautiful cinematography that reinforces the harsh nature of this new environment he's trapped in.



It's tough to talk too much about the story without ruining its twists (which are fairly predictable, but where's the fun in that?). However, we can say that the three leads are very strong (Knapp is particularly good, skirting the usual pitfalls of the 'quirky best friend' role) and Fishburne is perfectly cast; his calm but authoritarian tone establishing that Nic may well be in more trouble than he realises. Of the cast, only the ever-watchable Cooke is wasted, which is a shame.

However, as Eubank builds towards the finale, you'll find that you're fully invested in Nic's story. There's some beautiful cinematography and some excellent effects work, and this is a striking, affecting piece of work that lives up to its great buzz.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★☆

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Chronicle
Four friends find that alien powers come with a price in Josh Trank's excellent debut.

TRIVIA AT ONE POINT IN THEIR TRAVELS, THE TEENAGERS OF *PROJECT ALMANAC* HEAD TO THE 2013 LOLLAPALOOZA MUSIC FESTIVAL TO SEE A WHOLE HOST OF BANDS, INCLUDING IMAGINE DRAGONS.



THE TALE OF THE PRINCESS KAGUYA

Life after Miyazaki

Details PG // 137 mins // 20 March **Director** Isao Takahata **Screenwriters** Isao Takahta, Riko Sakaguchi **Cast** Aki Asakura, Tatsuya Nakadai, Nobuko Miyamoto **Distributor** StudioCanal



The retirement of Hayao Miyazaki may have seen the departure of one of cinema's most gifted filmmakers, but Studio Ghibli has never been a one-person outfit, and *The Tale Of The Princess Kaguya* is a beautiful, heart-warming reminder of what the masters of animation are capable of.

Sanuki no Miyatsuko (Tatsuya Nakadai) is a bamboo cutter who comes across something in the woods. One of the trees he cuts down holds a tiny princess, who transforms into a baby girl when he takes her home to his wife Ona (Nobuko Miyamoto). Naming her 'Princess', they raise her as their own, believing her to be a gift from Heaven.

When the bamboo cutter finds large quantities of gold in the trees, he takes this as a sign that they need to give Princess a better life, and decides that they should leave the woods and their friends to live as nobility in the city. But what does Princess want, and how will this drastic change affect her?



The Tale Of The Princess Kaguya is directed by Ghibli founding member Isao Takahata, maker of the stunning *Grave Of The Fireflies*, as well as *Pom Poko* and *My Neighbours The Yamadas*. It's hard to imagine this elegant animation coming from anyone else. It's based on the classic Japanese fairy tale *The Tale Of The Bamboo Cutter*, and perfectly combines form and story.

Princess, who goes on to be named Kaguya, takes her place in the grand tradition of Ghibli heroines. She's excitable and good-natured, stubborn and good-hearted, and her longing to return to the simpler life she knew before is heartbreaking. The stately pace and charming sense of humour that is the Ghibli trademark is present and correct, and the voice cast is absolutely wonderful. Nakadai and Miyamoto are particularly good as the bull-headed but well-meaning woodcutter and his quiet but perceptive wife respectively.

The film is a little lengthy at 137 minutes, but it's wonderfully made, filled with charming detail, and has a truly affecting emotional journey at its centre.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★☆

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Kiki's Delivery Service
Miyazaki's charming 1989 animation tells the story of a young witch trying to make her way in the world.



THE FALLING

God help the girl

Details 15 // 102 mins // 24 April **Director** Carol Morley **Screenwriter** Carol Morley **Cast** Maisie Williams, Florence Pugh, Maxine Peake, Monica Dolan, Greta Scacchi **Distributor** Metrodome

It's difficult to know how to classify *The Falling*. Carol Morley's film has its feet planted in period drama, but its head is off and away somewhere more fantastical. Whether or not something supernatural is at work is a question the script poses fairly early on, but Morley is far more concerned with the atmosphere that uncertainty creates rather than clarifying it.

It's 1969, and 16-year olds Lydia (Maisie Williams) and Abbie (Florence Pugh) are best friends at a girls' school, and Lydia is struggling to understand why her friend is suddenly so interested in sex. After a tragic event, Lydia begins fainting. Before long, the girls in their friends circle start to suffer from the same condition. Is it psychogenic, or something more elemental?

Morley's tale is steeped in British folk horror tradition. The camera frequently gazes up at a giant oak tree, Lydia's brother Kenneth (*Peaky Blinders*' Joe Cole) explains how the school is situated on ancient ley lines, and the soundtrack (by Everything But the Girl's Tracey Thorn) is eerily hypnotic. The primal potency of adolescence is tied to the earth, recalling *The Wicker Man* and Alan Garner (and *Carrie* at one point), and it's utterly compelling.

All of this is rooted in darkly comic kitchen sink-realism, as Lydia lashes out at her determinedly distant mother (Maxine Peake) and struggles to adjust to the changes that Abbie is going through. As her behaviour gets worse at home and school, Morley manages to show both sides of the situation, walking a fine line with great skill. Williams has impressed with her strong work on *Game Of Thrones*, and she's tremendous here, launching herself into the dark material while making sure we don't lose sight of the fragility and anger as Lydia becomes an increasingly powerful force within the school.

The rest of cast is superb too; Monica Dolan is particularly good as the cool headmistress who is determined to remain unfazed. It stumbles in the final act due to the need for an ending, but *The Falling* is beautifully shot, wonderfully atmospheric and very powerful.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★★

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



The Woods
Heather realises that something is very wrong with her boarding school in this chiller.

TRIVIA *THE TALE OF THE PRINCESS KAGUYA* IS STUDIO GHIBLI'S LONGEST FILM.



FILM INFO

Released
20 March
Certificate
U
Director
Tim Johnson
Screenwriters
Tom J Astle, Matt Ember
Cast
Rihanna, Jim Parsons, Steve Martin, Jennifer Lopez
Distributor
20th Century Fox
Running Time
93 mins



HOME

Nothing to write home about

***Home* presents a** new twist on the alien-invasion story, starring *The Big Bang Theory*'s Jim Parsons and singer Rihanna – both making their animated feature debuts.

When a well-meaning race of creatures called the Boov discover Earth, they think their troubles are over. The pint-sized invaders take over the planet, relocate its seemingly primitive population, and revel in their new home.

Their latest home, that is. The Boov have been pursued across the galaxy by their enemy, the Gorg. This menacing foe has a grudge against the tiny tentacled trespassers, as well as a habit of blowing up their latest safe haven.

Parsons plays the upbeat Oh. Named for the less-than-enthusiastic sound his fellow Boov make whenever he's around, Oh is cheerfully lonely. Desperate to make friends in a society that doesn't value such connections, he tries his best, but no one wants to be his friend.

Meanwhile, scrappy teenager Gratuity 'Tip' Tucci (Rihanna) manages to avoid capture, surviving by her wits and with a fierce determination to find her mother Lucy (Jennifer Lopez).



Because of his latest snafu, Oh inadvertently reveals his people's location to the Gorg, and becomes Boovian Enemy Number One. While on the run he crosses paths with the little girl, upgrades her car to a flying machine powered by slushies, and agrees to help find her mother. As they travel the world together, Oh learns from his human companion what it is to belong to a family, and the guarded Tip discovers that the Boov aren't all that bad.

Adapted from Adam Rex's story *The True Meaning Of Smekday*, *Home* dials down the book's social commentary while upping the 'true meaning of friendship' schtick. It's a sweet enough story that plunders the child-meets-adorable-alien playbook, but lacks the personality that made the likes of *Despicable Me* and *ParaNorman* entertaining and heartfelt. You can't help but think that Gru's minions had an awful lot to do with the Boov.

That's not to say that the world director Tim Johnson has created is without charm. The Boov are designed to be otherworldly yet endearing, with their stubby tentacle-feet and goofy grins. They change colour with their emotions, and that constant shifting adds a novel energy to them.

As for the cast, it's remarkable that no one thought to use Jim Parson's considerable vocal talents before now. As many Sheldon Cooper fans would have already guessed, he makes a rather convincing alien.

The actor affects a more eager version of his own voice, as well as Oh's strange Boovian syntax. "I has found our car," exclaims the purple critter. Lines like "Can I come into the out now?" are lifted from the source material, but when divorced from the novel's darker subtext, they do feel a little childish

Steve Martin's turn as the beautifully smug Captain Smek is a scene-stealer for obvious reasons, while Rihanna's raspy voice stretches the limits of her believability as a teen, but she brings warmth and humour to her character.

The bond between the Tip and Oh is the heart of the film, even if it seems to measure their friendship in selfies. *Home* doesn't sparkle enough to make the transition from kids film to modern classic.

To be fair, not every animated film can evoke *Toy Story 3* furnace scene levels of poignancy – there's only so much the heart can take. That said, *Home* is possibly the most cheerful alien-invasion-of-Earth film you're likely to see.

Krystal Sim
VERDICT ★★★☆☆

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Lilo & Stitch
A young girl adopts a puppy, not realising that he's actually a mischievous genetically engineered alien.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Our top three adorable aliens



ET
This little guy holds a special place in our hearts. Stranded on Earth, ET forms a close connection with lonely boy Elliott (Henry Thomas). Pretty much the prototype for all 'boy and his alien' movies since.



Stitch
All the best pets are genetically engineered killing machines. Lilo and Stitch have known loss, and it brings them together in the most touching way. Plus, Stitch manages to be both grumpy and adorable.



The Iron Giant
Do alien robots count? Long before he was Groot, Vin Diesel voiced the gentle Iron Giant. The movie teaches us that you are who you choose to be, and the moment when the Giant chooses to be Superman is a tear-jerker.

TRIVIA OH WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED 'JLO' IN THE NOVEL. COINCIDENTALLY JENNIFER LOPEZ IS PART OF THE VOICE CAST OF THE FILM – SHE PLAYS TIP'S MOTHER LUCY.



INTERSTELLAR

Lost in space

Details 12 // 168 mins // 2104 // Blu-ray · DVD // **Released** 30 March **Director** Christopher Nolan **Cast** Matthew McConaughey, Anne Hathaway, Jessica Chastain, Michael Caine, Casey Affleck, Bill Irwin, John Lithgow **Distributor** Warner Home Video



Christopher Nolan is a bona-fide auteur. He has made cinema his way for over 15 years. Big, ambitious and beautiful, *Interstellar* is, at times, a piece of visionary filmmaking. Presenting a stark, dark future for humanity, the film's first act depicts a planet on its last legs. In a world so crippled by famine that even the US Army has ceased to exist, Matthew McConaughey's Cooper is an engineer in a time that needs farmers, a man feeling so abject in his own world that he's willing to leave his own family to maybe find another. The first act of Nolan's vision is crisp, unforgiving and emotionally heart-rending.

But as the mission takes off, things start going awry immediately. Anne Hathaway's Brand is a strange amalgam of motives, the mission start is rushed, and as more layers are added, the more it's clear that *Interstellar* is a broken, incomplete creation.

Nolan is a master of the cinematic reveal, a modern filmmaking magician. And *Interstellar* certainly tries to pull the same trick as many of Nolan's masterpieces, presenting a picture, only to pull another more astounding one from behind it. All the elements are there for it: a journey of incredible discovery; a stunning visual presentation of wormholes, black holes and worlds beyond imagination; some thrilling action set-pieces; a fresh take on AI assistants; and a predictably excellent score from Hans Zimmer.



However, the core of the story is cripplingly unclear, suffocating inside a crumpled wrapper of half-executed ideas, unresolved strands of narrative and competing themes. Is it about humanity? Love? Family? Discovery? Forgiveness? Deceit? Not even the Nolans seem to know. With a clearer core, we could forgive the often-atrocious dialogue or the ludicrous climactic sequence, let the diabetes-inducing epilogue slide, and look past the fact that Cooper speaks exclusively in proverbs.

Interstellar is an attempt at a grand opus for a new age, presented with a flawless visual spectacle; a thing of beauty. But it's a hollow beauty.

Erlingur Einarsson
VERDICT ★★★☆☆

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Contact
Mankind finds it's not alone in Robert Zemeckis's masterpiece, starring McConaughey and Jodie Foster.

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY – PART 1

SciFiNow Must see now!

Playtime's over

Details 12 // 123 mins // 2014 // Blu-ray · DVD // **Released** March 16 **Director** Francis Lawrence **Cast** Jennifer Lawrence, Liam Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson **Distributor** Lions Gate Home Entertainment



The rise to stardom of Jennifer Lawrence has coincided with the vastly improving fortunes of the *Hunger Games* series. Having gone up in quality with each film, Part 1 of *Mockingjay* is undoubtedly the best yet.

The level of depth it goes into is practically unheard of from a YA film; in little over two hours, the wartime themes of survivor's guilt, PTSD and the use of propaganda are all examined in equal measure. Lawrence puts in the kind of performance we all knew she was capable of, the likes of Woody Harrelson and Elizabeth Banks commit it up a notch from their supporting roles in the previous two films, and reliable thesps like Julianne Moore and the late, great Philip Seymour Hoffman maintain their A-game.



The slightly slow opening third aside, this comes very close to being the perfect blockbuster film. With Part 2 on the horizon, we can't wait to see how it ends.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★☆

JUSTICE LEAGUE: THRONE OF ATLANTIS

SciFiNow Must see now!

Go fish

Details 15 // 72 mins // 2014 // Blu-ray · DVD // **Released** Out now **Director** Ethan Spaulding **Cast** Matt Lanter, Sean Astin, Rosario Dawson, Nathan Fillion **Distributor** Warner Home Video



Following on from *War, Throne Of Atlantis* is the second film in DC's animated feature series, this time focusing on the rise of Arthur 'Aquaman' Curry (Matt Lanter).

Marvel may be currently be leading the live-action film race, but there's a lot to be said for DC's animated output, with *Throne Of Atlantis* proving to be no slouch. In among the frenetic fist-fights and genuine high stakes the personality of each character is drawn out – obviously Aquaman takes centre stage, but it all feels legitimately DC and, most importantly, fun.



The voice cast is made up of talented sci-fi alumni, including *Firefly*'s Nathan Fillion as Green Lantern and *The Lord Of The Rings* Sean Astin as Shazam.

Things tale off by the end point, with the action ceasing with a whimper rather than a bang, but otherwise this a solid enough effort. With another sequel being teased, we look forward to seeing what's in store next.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★☆

TRIVIA THE SCIENCE OF WORMHOLES IN IS EXPLAINED IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY IN *INTERSTELLAR* AS IT IS IN 1997'S SCI-FI HORROR *EVENT HORIZON*, WITH A FOLDED PAPER AND A PEN.



RABID

Down with the sickness

Details 18 // 91 mins // 1977 // Blu-ray // **Released** Out now **Director** David Cronenberg
Cast Marilyn Chambers, Frank Moore, Joe Silver **Distributor** Arrow Films



David Cronenberg's body horror follow-up to the mighty *Shivers* sometimes gets overshadowed by its tower block-bound predecessor, but repeat viewings of *Rabid* show that it's more than worthy of being judged on its own merits.

Following a horrific motorbike crash, Hart (Frank Moore) and his girlfriend Rose (Marilyn Chambers) are rushed to the nearest medical centre, which happens to be an exclusive plastic surgery clinic. Hart escapes with a few broken bones, but Rose is in a coma and requires extensive skin grafts. When she finally wakes up, she finds that she has some new appetites. Thirsting for blood and carrying a horrifying virus, Rose turns the city of Montreal into a nightmare.

Rabid's combination of body horror and satire isn't as neat as *Shivers*', and it does see Cronenberg going over some similar ground. However, it's packed with skin-crawling chills (that surgery scene still packs a hell of a punch) and boasts plenty of mordant wit. The final act feels indebted to the best of George A Romero, as the city's inhabitants become rabid and ravenous and a government shoot-to-kill order is the only way to restore civilisation; the gory fate of a shopping mall Santa Claus is particularly memorable.

The film also boasts a strong performance from adult film star Marilyn Chambers, who was making an effort to break into the mainstream. It's an assured turn that keeps Rose sympathetic as she finds more and more victims for the phallic stinger in her armpit (yes, it's definitely a Cronenberg movie). The film's definitely more interested in her than Hart, who is as forgettable as *Scanners*' Cameron Vale or *The Brood*'s Frank Carveth.

It's a little scrappy and slightly messy, but sharp, shocking and effective. As you'd expect, Arrow Films has delivered an excellent Blu-ray package, assembling commentaries, interviews and a star-studded 1999 documentary on Cronenberg. Best of the bunch are a new interview with producer Ivan Reitman and an interesting – if brief – piece on the history of Cinépix with film writer Kier-La Janisse and make-up artist Joe Blasco.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



The Crazies
A virus turns normal people into remorseless killers in George A Romero's 1973 chiller.

THE COMEDY OF TERRORS

Casket case

Details 12 // 84 mins // 1963 // Blu-ray · DVD // **Released** Out now **Director** Jacques Tourneur **Cast** Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff, Joyce Jameson, Basil Rathbone **Distributor** American International Pictures



Comedy-horror is a difficult genre to nail. Adding too many laughs to the horror pot can overthrow the balance, leaving a mess that's not particularly anything. Conversely, not adding enough creates a half-hearted horror with bad gags: not comedy, nor horror. *The Comedy Of Terrors* doesn't fall complete flat, but it also doesn't hit the nail anywhere near the head.

An undertaker (Vincent Price) on the verge of bankruptcy finds himself with an urgent need to revamp his business. Not satisfied with stealing back and reusing caskets as he had been doing for years, he and his assistant (Peter Lorre) start breaking into the homes of wealthy old men to smother them and collect the commission when relatives come knocking, in need of a funeral.

It's often amusing, but rarely hilarious. It seems to have left the horror out altogether, and stands as an okay flat-out comedy that just happens to have some dead bodies in it. Even after such a fun cast and premise, it's just average. Sadly, its best joke is probably the title.

Poppy-Jay Palmer
VERDICT ★★★☆☆



OUIJA

Board to death

Details 15 // 85 mins // 2014 // Blu-ray // **Released** Out now **Director** Stiles White
Cast Olivia Cooke, Douglas Smith, Lin Shaye **Distributor** Universal Pictures UK



As far as board games with cinematic potential go, the Ouija board at least feels like it should have a decent scary movie in it. However, this latest things-going-bump-in-the-night Blumhouse horror isn't it.

Bates Motel's Olivia Cooke plays Laine, who decides to invoke the spirits when her best friend seemingly kills herself. Opening the door to the other side doesn't end well, and her group of friends start getting killed off one by one.

Ouija proceeds in the kind of determinedly routine fashion that makes 90 minutes seem like forever. The script undermines another strong performance from Cooke, and a welcome late appearance from genre veteran Lin Shaye, with painfully familiar characters and a plodding setup. The occasional jump-scare hits home, but there's no sense of tension or unease, simply because it's all so crushingly familiar.

This flat-pack horror feels like it came from a production line; devoid of personality or inspiration beyond recognising that Ouija boards have been creepy before.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆



TRIVIA CRONENBERG WANTED *CARRIE* STAR SISSY SPACEK FOR THE LEAD ROLE IN *RABID*, BUT THE PRODUCERS DIDN'T LIKE HER ACCENT.

CONTINUUM
Family fortunes

Details 15 // 93 mins // 2013 // Blu-ray · DVD · iTunes // **Released** Out now **Director** Richie Mehta **Cast** Gillian Anderson, Haley Joel Osment, Victor Garber, Rufus Sewell **Distributor** Entertainment One

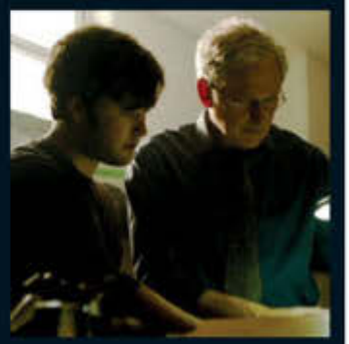


***Continuum* sells itself** as a sci-fi suspense thriller, but if you take away the time travel, 'family drama' would be a more apt description.

When a university professor (Rufus Sewell) with a young family doesn't return from a business trip, his wife (Gillian Anderson) has difficulty dealing with the mystery. Over a decade later, their son Erol (Haley Joel Osment) also becomes a budding scientist, mentored by his grandfather (Victor Garber), who believes the professor's disappearance had something to do with his time travel research. Caught up in his own research, Erol takes it upon himself to find out what happened once and for all and tries to change the past.

The story is interesting and unique, but it provokes mild intrigue rather than jaw-clenching suspense. Solid performances from the leads, especially Osment and Anderson, offer a lot of emotional depth. But again, the characters and their particular hardships would be more suited to a movie that didn't span from a professor going back in time to meet Albert Einstein.

Poppy-Jay Palmer
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆



WOLVES
Here comes the fuzz

Details 15 // 91 mins // 2014 // DVD // **Released** 16 March **Director** David Hayter **Cast** Lucas Till, Jason Momoa, Stephen McHattie **Distributor** Altitude



David Hayter (*X-Men*, *Watchmen*)'s directorial debut seems to be aiming to be a bad-ass *Teen Wolf*, but the occasional splash of gore and rape references are about the only things that set it apart from the PG-13 dark fantasy romances that it thumbs its snout at.

Cayden (*X-Men*'s Lucas Till) hits the road when he wolfs out and kills his parents. He soon realises that he's not alone, and settles in a small lycanthropic community that lives in fear of big bad Connor (Jason Momoa). Can Cayden restore peace and order to the town?



Hayter's first instincts aren't bad, and inspirations like *Near Dark* are most welcome, but by the time Cayden settles in with kindly farmer Stephen McHattie (*Pontypool*) and falls for the lovely bartender, we're on familiar ground that isn't made fresh by adult posturing. Using practical make-up is also admirable, but the wolves look, frankly, kind of cute. It's not a total disaster but it sits a lot more comfortably alongside things like *The Vampire Diaries* than we imagine the filmmakers would like, which have a much clearer idea of their target audience.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

HARDWARE

SciFiNow Must see now!

Not the terrible Martin Freeman TV series

Details 18 // 90 mins // 1990 // Blu-ray · DVD // **Released** Out now **Director** Richard Stanley **Cast** Dylan McDermott, Stacey Travis, Iggy Pop **Distributor** Three Wolves Ltd



Films can generally be divided into two rough categories: those that are before their time, and those that are of their time. There is a select band, however, that seem at odds with near enough every time period, making them hard to pin down.

Loosely adapted from the 2000 AD short story 'SHOK!', *Hardware* sees mercenary Mo (Dylan McDermott) purchase the pieces of a robot, which he takes home to his girlfriend Jill (Stacey Travis). However, it soon becomes apparent that said robot is a MARK 13 model, a self-repairing killer, leaving the pair fighting for their lives.



The above description makes this sound like your average run-of-the-mill *Terminator* clone, but it's so much more than that. Across the ruined landscape, frequent allusions to the current status quo are made. Overpopulation is apparently rife, the lead characters casually stroll past beggars and dead bodies, and Lemmy from Motorhead drives a speedboat/taxi ("You like music? Check these guys out" he says, casually blaring *Ace Of Spades* out the radio). It feels real and lived in, despite clearly having been filmed on some disused industrial estate.

Elsewhere, the direction is stylised almost to the point of parody. First-time director Richard Stanley cut his teeth making music videos, and it shows, most notably in an extended sex scene stretched out to cover the song length. This aside, he does a sterling job, with the browny orange colour palette fitting in perfectly with the grimy, lived-in feel of *Hardware*'s world.



He occasionally plays things a little too authentic, with the darkness of the footage making things hard to follow at times, but for the most part the effect this has is a positive one. The lack of lighting is a practical choice on a set that has clearly been cobbled together out of spare parts, so we can't really blame Stanley for this choice.

There are very few films around like *Hardware*, which effortlessly combines its rust-coloured aesthetic with an uncompromising social commentary. If you haven't seen it before, you could do worse than discover it now.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★☆

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Short Circuit
The 'nice' counterpart to *Hardware* – watch this after to reassure yourself that things aren't so bad.

TRIVIA DIRECTOR RICHARD STANLEY TRIED – AND ULTIMATELY FAILED – TO GET SEQUEL *HARDWARE II: GROUND ZERO* OFF THE GROUND.

THE TOXIC AVENGER PART III/IV

Blunt force Troma

Details 18 // 102/108 mins // 1989/2000 // Blu-ray // **Released** Out now **Directors** Lloyd Kaufman, Michael Herz/Lloyd Kaufman **Cast** Ron Fazio, Phoebe Legere, John Altamura /David Mattey, Clyde Lewis, Heidi Sjursen **Distributor** 88 Films





"15 years ago," intones Marvel huckster Stan Lee over the opening credits of *Citizen Toxie*. "A mop boy named Melvin Fyrd fell into a case full of toxic waste and became a hideously deformed creature of superhuman size and strength. He became... *The Toxic Avenger*, the first superhero from New Jersey! Then came two shitty sequels, sorry about that. This is the real sequel."

Fourth and (so far) final film *Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger IV*'s ★★☆☆☆ willingness to throw third film, *The Toxic Avenger Part III: The Last Temptation Of Toxie* ★★☆☆☆, under the safety bus buys it time, but the truth quickly becomes as transparent as the budget – both films are about as crappy as each other.

While 1986's *The Toxic Avenger* became an accidental cult hit thanks to its genre-bending mixture of tropes, each successive film consciously targeted that same demographic with outlandish gore, unnecessary sex and *Animal House* smut, hefty socio-political subtext (*Part III* opens with a gang taking over a video store and insisting it stock only films released by MGM and Warner Bros et al, while indignant patrons cry "No! We like variety!"), crowded scenes full of amatuer extras gurning and jostling for screen time and painfully over-laboured gags.

Over-laboured, in fact, is pretty much the definition of Kaufman's filmmaking style at this point, and every fight scene or comedic interlude is milked for every long minute of its corn syrup blood or prosthetic phallus rutting. With just over a decade separating the two films, *Citizen Toxie* at least boasts higher production values (Toxie himself looks better than ever) and lengthy cameos (porn star Ron Jeremy, splatter king Eli Roth, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* creator Kevin Eastman, a wooden and incoherent Lemmy Kilmister and *Guardians Of The Galaxy* director James Gunn doing an uncomfortable imitation of Stephen Hawking), but ultimately the difference between the two films is a matter of decimal points.

James Hoare



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Darkman

Sam Raimi's superhero schlocker mashes up the mix of horror and comedy with much darker results.

DOC OF THE DEAD

Alpha Romero

Details 15 // 81 mins // 2014 // DVD • blinkbox • Amazon // **Released** 30 March **Director** Alexandre O Philippe **Cast** George Romero, Max Brooks, Bruce Campbell, Robert Kirkman **Distributor** Altitude



One of the things the world definitely doesn't need – along with another desperately relevant (Vlog/App/Planking) *Of The Dead* film from George Romero – is a documentary explaining what the sub-genre really 'means'.

In spite of itself, Alexandre O Philippe's *Doc Of The Dead* charms its way into your viewing schedule thanks to its entertaining interviewees that include Simon Pegg, Max Brooks, Robert Kirkman, Bruce Campbell (some Deadites *are* zombies, some aren't – so that's that settled) and Saint George, among others, and focus on the wider cultural appeal of the brain-snacking cadavers. The net is cast surprisingly widely too, with Voodoo practitioners and survivalists weighing in.



The lack of significant study given to the nihilistic and visceral Italian and Spanish zombie films is pretty glaring though, and there's still a market for a doc that ties Lucio Fulci's unflinching grot into the Years of Lead or points to Falangism as the root cause for the zombie Templars of Amando de Ossorio.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★★☆☆





Season Four

SciFiNow Must see now!

THE AVENGERS

The Peel Deal

FILM INFO

Released
Out now
Year Made
1965
Certificate
PG
Creator
Sydney Newman, Brian Clemens
Cast
Patrick Macnee, Diana Rigg
Distributor
Studio Canal
Running Time
1,352 mins
Format



BONUS FEATURES

The pick of the new inclusions in this boxset

Commentaries
Director Roy Ward Baker, screenwriter/producer Brian Clemens, actress Elizabeth Shepherd and more give intriguing new insights into the making of the show.

Alternative ending
The classic episode 'Death At Bargain Prices' receives a whole new ending.

Trailers
See how times have changed with the original previews for 'Strange Case Of The missing Corpse', 'The Gravediggers' and more.

It's now half a century since gifted unknown Diana Rigg brought to life brainbox Emma Peel for the fourth season of *The Avengers*, and her effervescent rapport with Patrick Macnee's special agent John Steed is the primary reason that these 26 episodes are still so compulsive and enchanting.

The Avengers' fourth season is often hailed as the creative-high watermark of this most unique, influential and deliriously British cultural phenomenon, and the sumptuous quality is evident at all levels of production. In Mrs Peel's first year, *The Avengers* was shot on 35mm film for the first time (helping make it one of the first British series to run on prime-time American TV), and the stylish cinematography is more crisp and vivid than ever on this long-awaited Blu-ray edition.

Steed and Mrs Peel did their avenging in a fantastical, little English world of their own, populated by maniacal villains, shifty obsessives and larger-than-life archetypes, performed with relish by British character actors. Memorable turns include Ronald Fraser as a dotty railway enthusiast, Bill Fraser (no relation) as an incoherent blustering imperialist, Noel Purcell as a fervent, apocalyptic ark-builder, and Christopher Benjamin as a spectacularly fruity perfume magnate. This, Clemens reasoned, was the only sort of milieu where a bowler-hatted, Bentley-driving old Etonian and a kung-fu dynamo in a leather catsuit could get away with being undercover agents.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, the line was allowed to blur between light fantasy and outright sci-fi, with some of the era's best-remembered stories involving irresistible genre tropes like killer vegetables from space ('Man-Eater Of Surrey Green'), deadly rainmaking devices ('A Surfeit Of H2O') and merciless robot assassins ('The Cybernauts'). From a show that had developed as a tough crime/espionage thriller, this approach wasn't always welcomed by production company ABC. Another bone of ABC contention was the 'tag' scenes – brief, comedic sequences of Steed and Mrs Peel travelling home at the end of each episode – which Clemens successfully argued as crucial to the programme's overall tone and shape.

Previously, Steed had already enjoyed a productive on-screen partnership with Honor Blackman's Cathy Gale from 1962-64, herself an iconic figure of the time, and it was crucial for her successor to improve on this chemistry. It took months of auditions and tests before Elizabeth Shepherd was cast as Emma Peel, but after shooting began, it was evident that she wasn't right. The footage was scrapped and more actresses tested, until in walked Rigg, who proved an instant revelation. Her Mrs Peel was the perfect match for Steed, and as we watch this dynamic duo working in rare complementary sync, it is evident how much the actors enjoyed each other's company. In the commentary for episode 'A Town Of No Return', Clemens likens their interplay to "superb ping-pong".

But as much as the delivery and dialogue sparkle, perhaps the greatest joy is in the brief, underplayed glances and nods, wry smirks and wrinkled noses. At the climax of Clemens' riveting Mrs Peel-centric character study 'The House That Jack Built', Steed arrives to save his companion just as she has already extricated herself from danger. "What happened to the shining armour?" she quips. "It's still at the laundry," he retorts. She then gives him a lingering, winsome look of grateful affection so radiant and sincere it visibly flusters the undemonstrative Englishman. They walk off arm-in-arm in pregnant silence, for once without a single quip.

It's electric, and it's the reason *The Avengers* Season Four will still be watched and loved in another 50 years. That and the killer vegetables from space.

Chris Chantler
VERDICT ★★★★★

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Strange Report
Criminologist Anthony Quayle and photographer Anneke Wills investigate bizarre crimes in Swinging London.

TRIVIA DIANA RIGG IS THE FIRST PERSON TO EVER PERFORM KUNG-FU ON SCREEN.

HALO: NIGHTFALL

Continuing the terrible live-adaptation trend

Details 12 //98 mins // 2014 // Blu-ray DVD // **Released** 16 March **Creator** Sergio Mimica-Gezzan **Cast** Mike Colter, Christina Chong, Steven Waddington **Distributor** Animatsu



It can be difficult to see a couple caught in an abusive relationship, but sometimes there's nothing you can do but sit back, watch it unravel, and hope that something can be salvaged by the end of it. But if history has taught us anything, it's that Hollywood and videogames just don't work together. But still the pair continues to jump back into bed. The latest casualty to this ongoing toxicity? The *Halo* franchise and Ridley Scott's already-tarnished reputation.

Pitched as a prelude to the anticipated *Halo 5: Guardians*, this was supposed to be Microsoft's opportunity to prove there is more to *Halo* than bodacious action. But here's the truth of it all: the series hasn't persisted over a decade on the strength of its narrative. Clearly, somebody forget to send this memo to *The Pillars Of The Earth* director Sergio Mimica-Gezzan and executive producer Ridley Scott. In fact, *Halo: Nightfall* bares all the components of a typical Syfy original – 98 minutes of stilted acting, cheesy effects, bad fight sequences and exposition-heavy dialogue.

Halo: Nightfall fails to offer any glimpses into *Halo 5*, whilst failing to deliver any live action thrills as legendary manhunter Jameson Locke (Mike Colter) investigates a terrorist threat on a distant alien world. But then again, producing an action-heavy TV series is expensive, so what were we really expecting? Take the bombast out of *Halo*, and you are left with a story with the emotional depth of *The Phantom Menace* and action scenes that make *Prometheus* seem Academy Award-worthy by comparison.

While we were hoping *Halo: Nightfall* would offer a glimpse into what we can expect from Colter as Luke Cage in Marvel's *AKA Jessica Jones*, he has very little to work with. In fact, the entire cast is flat amid a deflating flurry of sci-fi tropes and bad writing. *Halo* has real potential to translate to Hollywood, but Microsoft has missed an easy opportunity to introduce a wider audience to its premier game series.







Josh West
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Halo: Forward Unto Dawn
Working on a low budget, it's fun for franchise die-hards, but nothing special.



FIVE TRIBES: THE DJINNS OF NAGALA

Publisher: Days Of Wonder // **Players:** 2-4 // **RRP:** £44.99

Everything about Bruno Cathala's latest game is superb. It has gorgeous components, the rules are easy to learn, and it's an innovative spin on the typical worker placement game. Oh, and did we mention that it allows you to control an impressive range of powerful djinns?

Turn position is incredibly important in *Five Tribes*, so players need to bid against each other in order to go first. Each player can pay a number of gold coins to determine where they'll stand. Initially, you will want to hang back to get an idea of the board state, but as the game progresses it becomes more advantageous to ensure that you do get to make the first move before your opponents.

Once turn progression has been decided, players take it in turn to move the five tribes, which are represented by different-coloured Meeples. At the beginning, all the Meeples are distributed randomly across the 30-tile game board, meaning the tribes are spread

1 BOARD
The main board is made up of 30 double-sided tiles that ensure no two games are ever exactly the same.

2 MEEPLES
There are a number of different-coloured Meeples representing Merchants, Assassins, Builders, Elders and Viziers.

3 DJINN CARDS
Access these powerful monsters to greatly affect how the game can play out.

4 COINS
You won't get very far without coins, so do everything you can to ensure that you always have a healthy amount to use.

5 CAMELS
Put one of these down whenever you completely clear a tile of Meeples.

6 RESOURCE CARDS
You'll score bonus points for collecting as many different resources as possible. You need to be careful though, as each resource has a limited number available, making sets difficult to complete.

7 TURN ORDER TRACK
Want to make sure you go first? You're going to have to pay a hefty amount of coins for the privilege.

throughout the city. Players take a handful of Meeples from a tile, and then randomly distribute them on the adjacent tiles, making sure not to move backwards or diagonally. The final Meeple dropped must share a colour with one of the Meeples already on the same tile. The player then removes all the Meeples of that colour from the tile and gains the benefit of its power, which range from taking resource cards to gaining coins or killing other Meeples. If a player clears a tile completely then they immediately claim it, adding a camel and receiving any benefits found there. Benefits range from adding palm trees and palaces and being able to buy cards from the market to summoning powerful djinns.

The djinns add greatly to the core game, having a variety of useful abilities that range from having your Viziers earn more points to taking control of tiles that contain only Meeples. There are 22 djinns in total, but the nature of the game means you'll rarely see more than a few in play. Add the random nature of the tile and Meeple distribution, and no two games of Five Tribes are ever the same. The end result is a highly imaginative and competitive game that you will immediately want to place in your collection.

BEST FOR: SOCIAL GAMERS



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TOP FIVE

MAGIC: THE GATHERING - MAGIC 2015



1. NISSA, WORLDWAKER £18



2. GOBLIN RABBLEMASTER £16



3. AJANI STEADFAST £10



4. CHANDRA, PYROMASTER £10



5. LILIANA VESS £10

DC Comics: Forever Evil

Publisher: Cryptozoic // **Players:** 2-5 // **RRP:** £29.99

It's been a long time coming, but you're finally able to play as the bad guys in Cryptozoic's popular deck-building game. For anyone who has never played a deck-builder before, the aim is to take it in turns to purchase cards, which are sent to your discard pile. Once your draw deck is depleted, you shuffle your discarded cards back in, slowly building your deck in time.

Forever Evil works the same as previous games in the series, only now you control notable villains, from Blizzard and Deathstroke to Sinestro and Lex Luthor (sadly, The Joker is nowhere to be seen). The villains must build up their resources until they have the relevant skills to beat Batman, Superman and a host of other popular DC heroes.

One big difference to previous games in the series is that there's a far bigger focus on card-drawing than in previous expansions, meaning games can be far quicker once combos are started. The ability to earn Victory Points is also new. Specific cards earn the ability to earn extra points, which can make a huge difference at the end of the game. Add in far more cards with destructible powers, and *Forever Evil* becomes a lot more confrontational than any of the past expansions.

BEST FOR: FANS OF CONFLICT GAMING



Arcadia Quest

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games // **Players:** 2-4 // **RRP:** £79.99

Arcadia Quest is a fast-paced dungeon crawler that has been heavily informed by popular PVP computer games. The objective is to effectively take part in a large campaign, with the aim of ensuring your guild manages to defeat its rivals.

Each player creates their guild using three of the available 12 starting characters. They must then select equipment and complete a set number of missions in order to win. Everything is themed to the story, meaning you'll be doing things like rounding up enemies and closing the city's gate to stop more enemies from appearing. The need to take on your opponents also adds an interesting spin to proceedings, as it makes the game incredibly competitive. Death is handled interestingly, with resurrected characters drawing Death Curses, which will give their player a negative ability during the next round.

The combat mechanics are dice-based but extremely robust, offering a surprising amount of strategy, particularly when managing crowds of enemies. It's brilliantly fast-paced too, with each scenario typically taking around 45 minutes to play. Add in some truly stunning components (particularly the incredibly detailed miniatures), and *Arcadia Quest* becomes one of the first must-own games of 2015, even if you don't like standard dungeon delvers.



BEST FOR: COMPETITIVE PLAYERS

Expansion Of The Month

ELDRITCH HORROR: MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

Publisher: Libellud // **Players:** 3-6 // **RRP:** £24.99

After the disappointing *Forsaken Lore*, the new *Eldritch Horror* expansion is pleasing. Everything about *Mountains Of Madness* is epic. There's loads of new content, such as brand new investigators, cards and plenty of locations and resources. It also introduces Focus Tokens, which enable you to re-roll die and perform other handy options.

By far the biggest addition is the brand new board that attaches to the original, *Talisman*-style. It allows for the introduction of plenty of new enemies, including two incredibly dangerous Ancient Ones. All in all, it's a superb expansion that greatly adds to the core game.

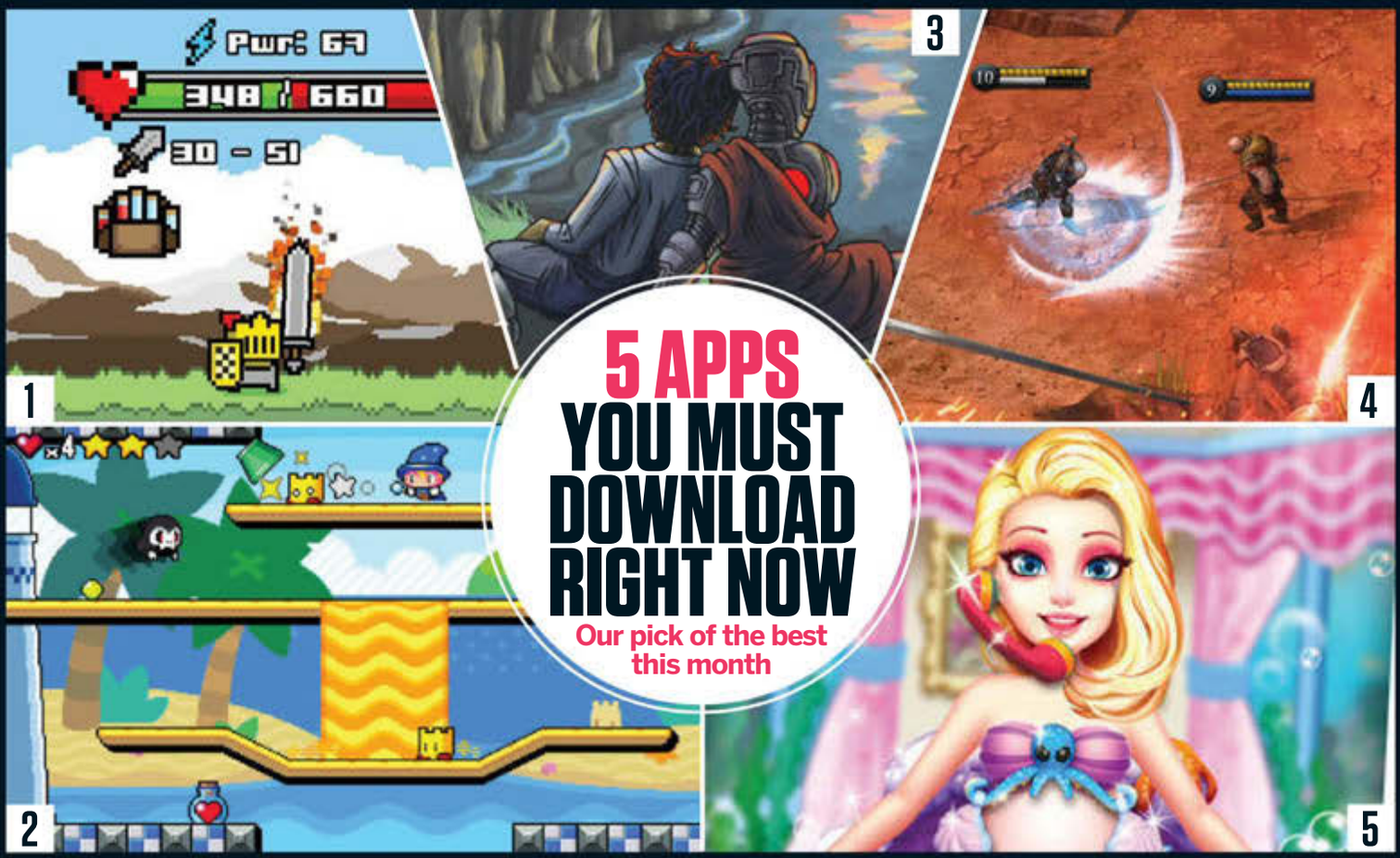
Do You Remember?

THE WARLOCK OF FIRETOP MOUNTAIN

HP Lovecraft

Considering the massive success of the popular adventure book, it was perhaps inevitable that it would receive a board game translation. In many aspects it's essentially a rebranding of the classic TSR game *Dungeon*, with your characters starting at the base of the warlock's mountain and slowly building their way through it.

Unlike *Dungeon*, the players were required to find the correct combination of three keys that would open the Warlocks' famed treasure chest found at the end of the game. It adds a *Cluedo*-like element, with players trying to trick each other into revealing the required combination so they can gain the Warlock's riches for themselves.



5 APPS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD RIGHT NOW

Our pick of the best this month

COMBO QUEST

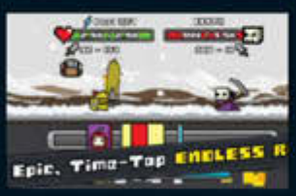
PRICE: £0.79/$0.99
FOR: IOS/ANDROID



1 Lovers of tapping, role playing and endless runners can finally play a game that combines all three. With *Combo Quest*, play as a tiny knight, slaying foes through to earn back the Combo Crown that was taken from you by a dragon. The main aim of the game is to see how far you can get on one life. The colourful backdrops, sound effects, fun chip-music soundtrack and lively characters make it a game that's difficult to put down.

BEST FOR: TAP TAP HEROES





DROP WIZARD

PRICE: £1.99/$2.99
FOR: IOS



2 Get addicted to this fun new arcade game from Gionathan Pesaresi. *Drop Wizard* is super-retro, with a 16-bit pixelated art style that comes with a sense of nostalgia. Play as Teo the Wizard, and navigate a bright and colourful land, dropping through platforms and stamping on bunnies, turnips and monsters to gain bonus points. Once you've mastered wand attacks and got them down to a fine art, you can start collecting health potions and power-ups while you jump.

BEST FOR: ARCADE FIENDS





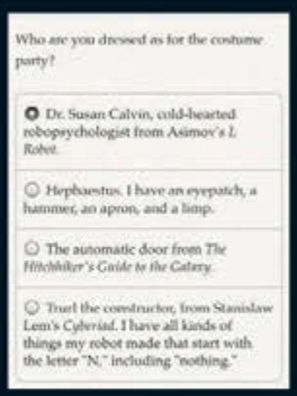
CHOICE OF ROBOTS

PRICE: £3.99/$5.99
FOR: IOS/ANDROID



3 The hefty price may have you backing off, but *Choice Of Robots* is actually pretty awesome, and well worth the fee. It's a text-based choose-your-own-adventure type game. Build your robot from scratch, personalising every detail from its gender, pronouns and orientation to how it reacts to situations. Watch its stats grow and fall as it becomes more ruthless or empathetic! Every action has a consequence, so it's up to you how you raise your robot.

BEST FOR: INVENTORS



THE WITCHER BATTLE ARENA

PRICE: FREE
FOR: IOS/ANDROID



4 For a fast, fun and fantastical MOBA, *The Witcher Battle Arena* ticks all the boxes. Play over the internet in teams of three and commence battle to take down your rival players and capture conquest points. Battles are short and intense, so it's perfect for on-the-go slaughtering. Sans connection, you can practice and fine-tune your technique by going up against the game's AI.

BEST FOR: BATTLE VICTORS





MERMAID'S NEWBORN BABY DOCTOR

PRICE: FREE
FOR: IOS/ANDROID



5 It might have an age rating of 4+, but how could anyone not be intrigued by an app with a title tile featuring a pregnant cartoon mermaid? It's your job to look after the mummy mermaid and give her the best care. Rub lotions on her stomach and do blood tests before helping her through labour. From there, it's your job to cut the umbilical cord and bathe, feed and generally take care of the baby.

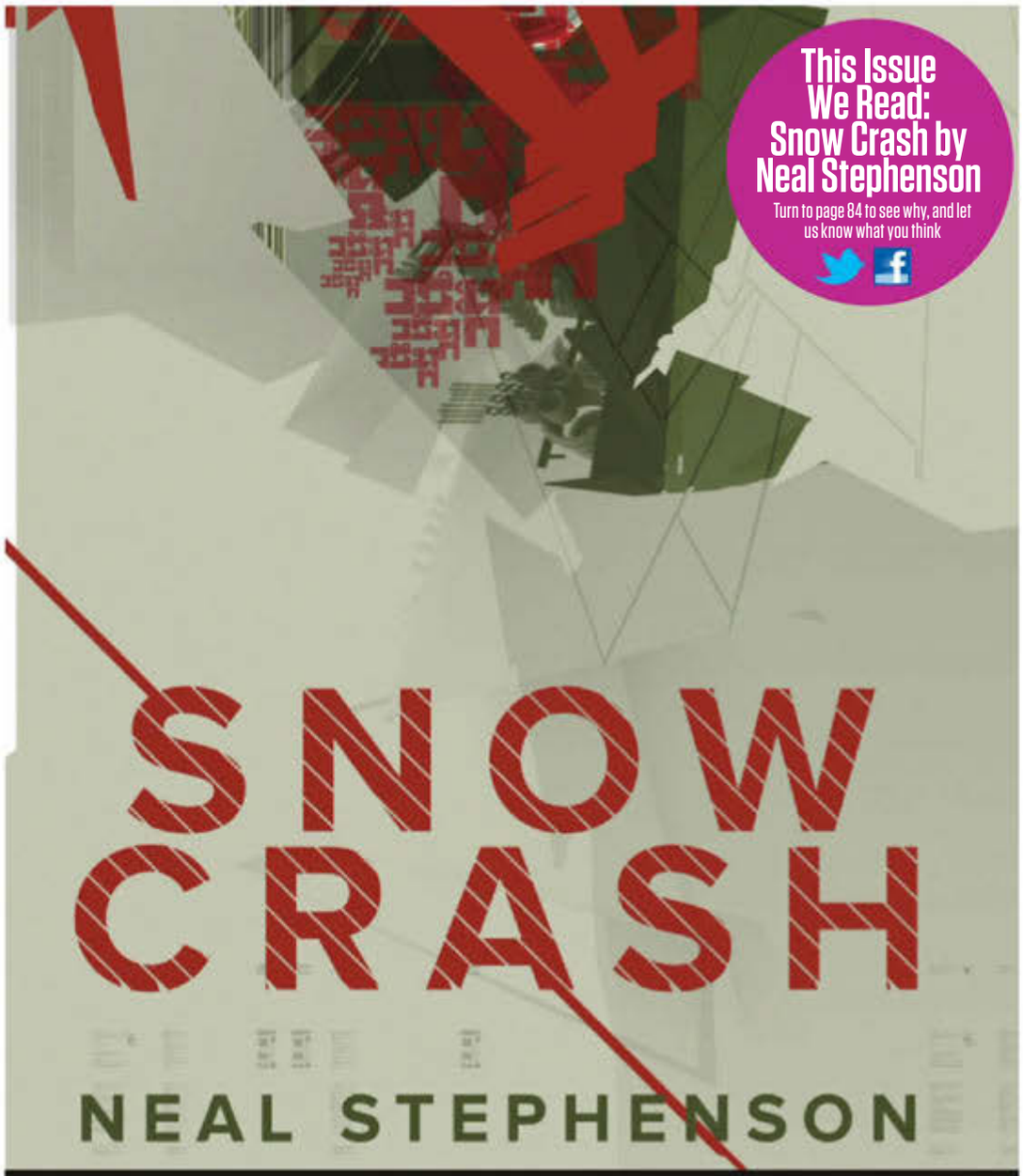
BEST FOR: OCEAN DWELLERS



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This Issue We Read: Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson

Turn to page 84 to see why, and let us know what you think

Next We'll Be Reading: Dangerous Visions by Harlan Ellison



1 Pick up the anthology of science fiction shorts *Dangerous Visions*, edited by Harlan Ellison, the man who led the new wave of science fiction.

2 Follow **SciFiNow** on Twitter. Read and share your thoughts with the hashtag #BookClub; they might make it into the magazine!

3 You can contribute to the Book Club discussions as much or as little as you like; the most important thing is that you have fun.

4 Pick up issue 106 of **SciFiNow** to check out what we thought and learn about the history of the book and its author with our Essential Read.

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Discover the best of the *His Dark Materials* creator.

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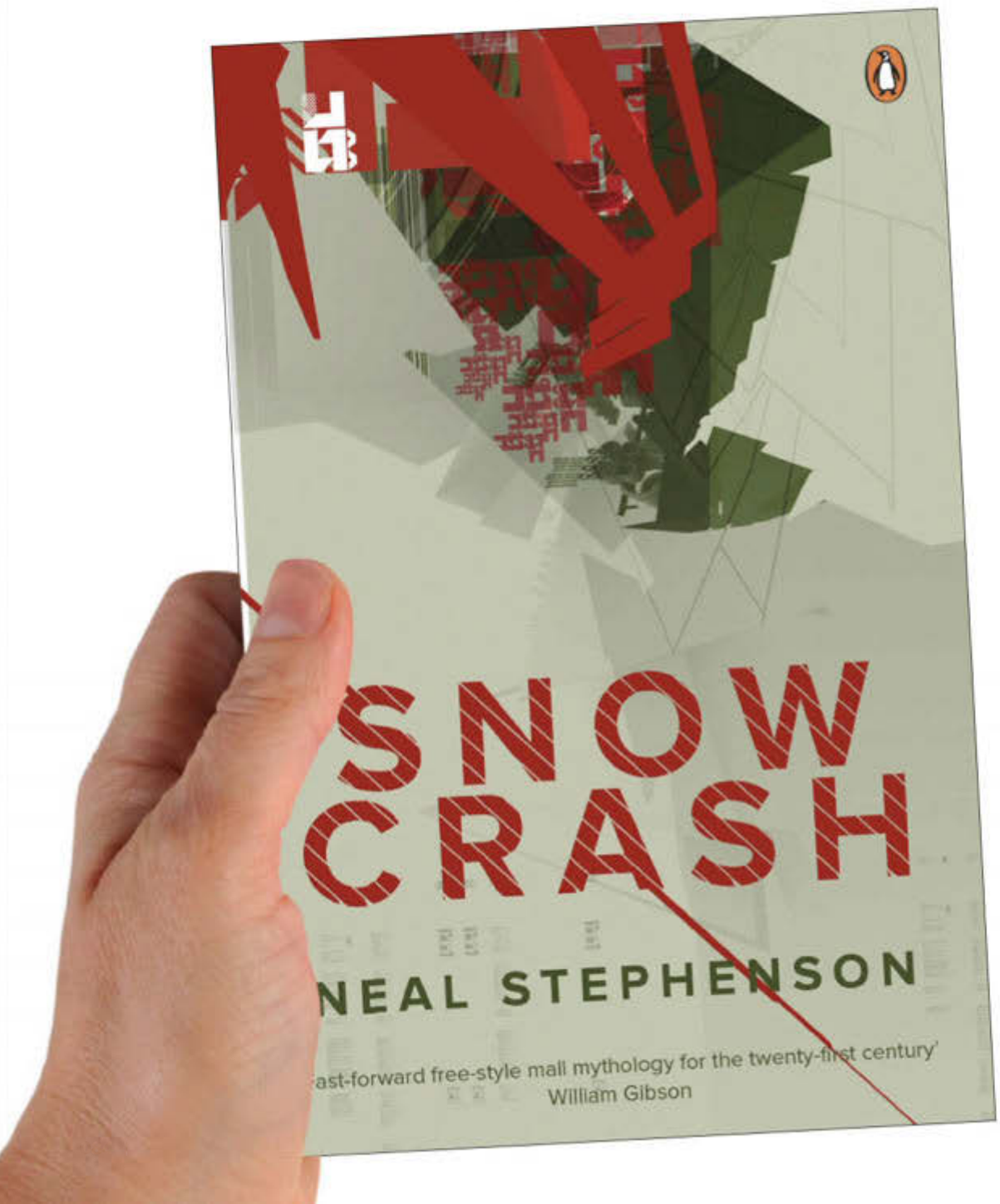
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ESSENTIAL READ: SNOW CRASH

WORDS
MATTHEW
HANDRAHAN

IS NEAL STEPHENSON THE LAST SCIENCE FICTION AUTHOR TO ACCURATELY PREDICT THE FUTURE? THE CONNECTED WORLD OF SNOW CRASH MAY NOT BE HERE YET, BUT IT'S WELL ON ITS WAY





Was Nostradamus a science fiction writer? To label him as such would surely test the limits of any previous definition of the term, and yet that 16th Century French apothecary is widely regarded as the ne plus ultra in a discipline venerated by both fans and practitioners of the genre: the ability to predict the future. From Jules Verne and HG Wells in the 19th Century to Isaac Asimov and Arthur C Clarke in the 20th, the worth of science fiction has often been judged on its 'accuracy' relative to the future worlds it depicts. Not every author attempts this kind of feat, of course, but those that do with any measure of success tend to be placed alongside the greats.

Neal Stephenson is one such author, and that's largely down to the 1992 novel that made his name: *Snow Crash*, which described in great detail an always online, anarcho-capitalist society that could plausibly be the end-point of humanity's current trajectory. When asked about his abilities as a futurist since the publication of *Snow Crash*, Stephenson has tended to laugh the question off. To him, a sci-fi story is a shotgun blast of ideas, some of which will inevitably seem more accurate from several decades removed. In an interview with Tor, he conceded that the rate and breadth of change in the modern world has made any prediction almost impossible.

SYNOPSIS



21st Century Los Angeles is a confusing place. No longer a part of the United States, a connected, fractured society ruled by big business and private interests, where a trillion dollar bill will scarcely pay for a cup of coffee.

Not that anyone uses paper currency any more. Commerce, like so much else, happens in the Metaverse. In there, a person can be who they want to be, and experience what they never thought possible. Like Snow Crash, a new drug whose effects ripple through both the corporeal and virtual worlds, exclusively available only to those with membership to one of the most elite clubs in the Metaverse.

Hiro Protagonist – A hacker, a swordfighter, and former pizza delivery guy to the Mafia – has never been one of those people, but a career change to the clandestine world of selling intelligence will change all that. Soon, he will know more about Snow Crash than is good for his health.

"[The] epiphany we had was that today's sci-fi writers are being asked to predict the outcomes of innumerable futures in huge areas – like biotech, genetic engineering, computers – which is a lot more than was asked of Robert A Heinlein. He was like, 'Okay, there's going to be rockets. Go. See what you can make of that.'

"There was like a structured plan for the future – a timeline – that just had to be filled in by Heinlein and company."

And yet, if any author was positioned to continue the predictive tradition of Heinlein and Asimov, it was surely Stephenson. Born in Maryland, USA in 1959, he was the child of a family dominated by scientists and engineers: his mother, his father, and both of his grandfathers all worked in the field, and when the time came to give direction to his own future at Boston University, he chose to study physics. Naturally, Stephenson's environment during those formative years was reflected in his reading, which was almost exclusively sci-fi for an extended period – Robert Heinlein's *Have Spacesuit Will Travel* and Andre Norton's *Zero Stone* were personal favourites, although nothing within the genre was off-limits.

For a time, Stephenson felt his mind expanding with every new discovery, but as he neared the end of high school and contemplated the start of his further education studying actual science, the genre had lost some of its lustre. It was the same old ideas with the same old execution – at least, that's how it felt at the time – and eventually he stopped reading science fiction altogether.

Then, one day in the iconic year of 1984, an epiphany hit: William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

"It was a real thunderbolt for me," Stephenson recalled in an interview with *Locus Magazine* in 1999. "I had gotten interested in writers who had a really vivid style: Hunter Thompson, Tom Wolfe. And if I was going to be a writer, that was how I wanted to do it. Then to see that really vivid, literary style of writing in a science fiction book, and not a space opera, but something set on the surface on the Earth, and have these noir overtones, to me it was an amazing synthesis of several things I was interested in."

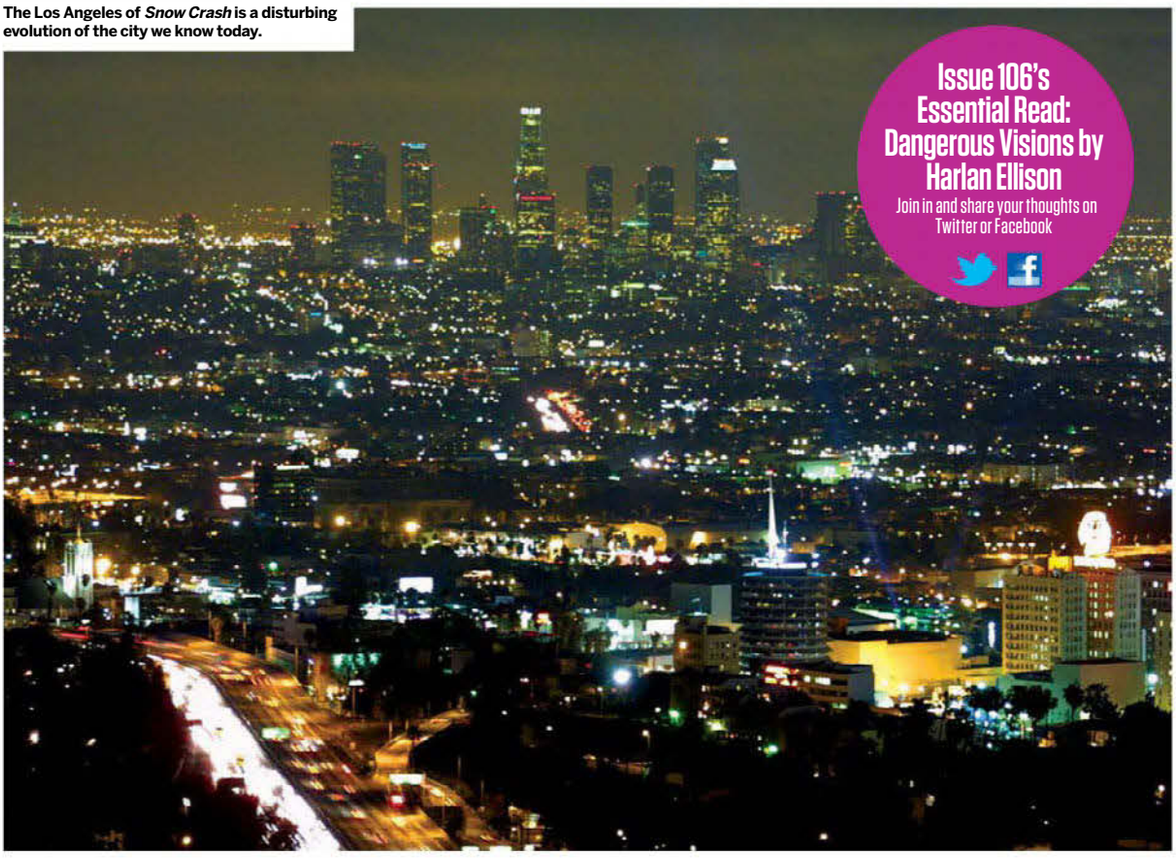
Stephenson's debut novel, *The Big U*, was published later in 1984, with his second, *Zodiac*, following in 1988. Read today, neither is immediately obvious as a Stephenson story, and that lack of distinctive character showed in the marketplace. Even so, early in his emerging career, the idea of labouring over novels that excited only a few thousand people and brought in just enough money to limp on to the next was far from exciting. For a brief period, Stephenson contemplated trying to emulate Tom Clancy – at that time one of the wealthiest authors alive – by writing politically charged thrillers. But he had one idea he simply couldn't leave behind: an idea inspired by the booming popularity of home computers.



Stephenson was inspired after reading William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

"If they showed up at all in science fiction, for a long time computers showed up in ways that were obviously at variance with how computers actually developed in the real world. It was always the giant computer the size of a city block," he said in an interview with Barnes & Noble. "The whole cyberpunk thing was, I think, a ⇨

The Los Angeles of *Snow Crash* is a disturbing evolution of the city we know today.



Issue 106's Essential Read: Dangerous Visions by Harlan Ellison

Join in and share your thoughts on Twitter or Facebook

5 Reasons to read... Snow Crash

1 Because *Snow Crash* is less than 500 pages long. Stephenson told *The AV Club*, "I'm not a small-literary-novel kind of guy," and he wasn't kidding. His later novels routinely top out above 1,000 pages, densely packed with detail and information.

2 Because it's more approachable than you'd think. *Snow Crash* is a lot funnier than most comparable novels, and relative to Stephenson's books like *The Baroque Cycle* and *Anathem*, this is basically light entertainment.

3 Because you use the internet. It would be foolish to claim that any single text influenced something as malleable as the internet, but *Snow Crash* is at the very least a footnote.

4 Because it looks more and more like our actual future all the time. Cyberspace is one thing, but Stephenson's take on the way corporations will come to supersede governments is also depressingly plausible.

5 Because the name Neal Stephenson may become closely to actual virtual reality. As the "chief futurist" at Magic Leap, he's one of the main thinkers at perhaps the exciting company to be blurring the lines between the digital and the real.

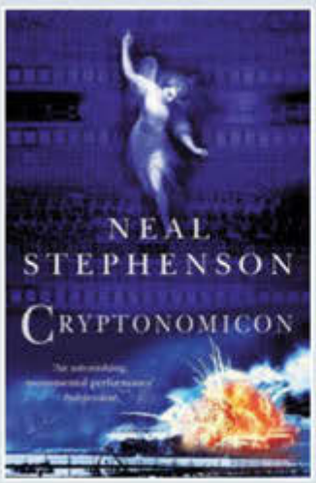
Where Have I Seen This Before?

DIGITAL WARRIORS

THE SPRAWL TRILOGY

Stephenson had started to lose interest in science fiction when he encountered William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and yet by the time he'd finished he wanted to follow its iconoclastic trajectory. *The Sprawl Trilogy*, which also includes *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, is effectively the bedrock on which *Snow Crash* would be constructed.





CRYPTONOMICON

Some authors are uncomfortable with the 'science fiction' label, and yet Stephenson wears it with pride, despite the astonishing range of subject matter in his books. For him, the genre is defined by an approach to building the world, which is why *Cryptonomicon* feels so reminiscent of *Snow Crash* despite being set only in the present and past rather than the future.

SECOND LIFE

Linden Lab's pioneering online world doesn't have the same cultural cache it did at the end of the last decade, but it will go down as a landmark in the development of social virtual spaces. More to the point, Linden Lab founder Philip Rosedale has cited *Snow Crash* as one of his key inspirations in forming the *Second Life* concept.





THE MATRIX

The 'virtual world' concept is now a fundamental part of popular culture, thanks in no small part to the publication of *Snow Crash*. But the most widely known virtual world arrived seven years later in the Wachowskis' peerless action masterpiece. The main difference here is that humans are unwilling or oblivious captives in a gilded digital cage.



READY PLAYER ONE

There's much more to *Snow Crash* than the 'metaverse' alone, but if you find the idea of society creating its own idealised simulacrum intriguing then you should make time for Ernest Cline's 2011 bestseller. *Ready Player One*'s virtual world here is called 'OASIS', but the themes Cline explores owe a clear debt to Stephenson. Well worth a read for fans of the genre.

TRANSMETROPOLITAN

You scarcely need an incentive to recommend Warren Ellis' scathingly funny comic series, but there is something of *Snow Crash* in *Transmetropolitan*'s DNA. There are no virtual worlds or cyberspaces, exactly, but the depiction of a futuristic metropolis in which greed, consumerism and avarice run riot is very familiar. Definitely check it out as soon as you are able to.



movement in which the people who wrote science fiction suddenly realised that we'd gotten it wrong to that point: that computers were turning out differently than we had imagined, and we had to go back and work them into the body of science fiction."

With *Snow Crash*, Stephenson accomplished that goal with remarkable confidence and no small amount of creative flourish. In a very real sense, it was the first example of a style that he would make entirely his own, but without the sheer volume and depth or detail that can make later works like *Cryptonomicon*, *The Baroque Cycle* and *Anathem* so intimidating. Stephenson wanted to rethink the role of computers and information technology in science fiction, but he didn't want to disregard one of the strengths that made the genre so magnetic in the first place: a good story, well told.

"I was just reading a review of my book by someone of the school that it's kind of unsophisticated and almost embarrassing to include narrative in a novel, that it's kind of sentimental and old-fashioned to have something like a plot," he told *The AV Club* in 1999. "And that's something I've never quite understood. There are all sorts of things that are supposed to go into a novel – there's characterisation and use of language and ideas and a story – and it's not clear to me why some people are picking on narrative or plot as if it's an aspect of a novel that has to be done away with. I have no idea where that comes from."

Like *Neuromancer*, *Snow Crash* is essentially a story of the sort found in pulpy noir novels, only set against one of the most vividly imagined backdrops in the history of science fiction. Stephenson has a fondness for comparing the approach to that used by Melville for *Moby Dick*, a novel that can be boiled down to a short, sharp sentence, but that is also packed with evocative details of its time, place, and the psychological make-up of its characters. *Snow Crash* may not quite stand beside *Moby Dick* in terms of artistic achievement, but the fact that the analogy works on any level is testament to Stephenson's feat of imagination and intellect.

The 21st Century depicted in *Snow Crash* remains a striking vision. Governments all over the world have weakened and crumbled as corporations flourished and prospered, their influence so pervasive that commercial entities and wealthy individuals operate in much the same way as nation states, ruling over slices of the population and circulating their own currencies. Few traditional currencies besides the Japanese Yen have any value, and the US dollar has become so worthless

that any denomination below a billion is scarcely worth printing. In the world of *Snow Crash*, America (such as it is) only does four things better than any other remaining country: "Music. Movies. Microcode. High-Speed Pizza Delivery."

And yet as rich and evocative as those details are, the lasting success of Stephenson's book is summed up by 'Microcode'. *Snow Crash* is set across both real and virtual worlds, with the latter starting to overtake the former in terms of its influence and popularity. Stephenson's depiction of how a vast, connected virtual society might work has played a role in the way the real one has developed, with products as diverse as *World Of Warcraft* and Google Earth owing *Snow Crash* a significant creative debt.

And that process is far from over. At some point in the next few years, Oculus VR will unleash its Rift headset on the world, and many believe the true potential of virtual reality will be realised. With the company now owned by Facebook, the kind of connected social and commercial spaces imagined by Stephenson could become a reality faster than anyone dared imagine even a decade ago. And the kicker? Michael Abrash, the chief scientist at Oculus VR and the one person driving what VR will become more than anyone else, credits his entire career to a fateful encounter with *Snow Crash*.

> "THE AUTHORS WHO HAD BEEN PREDICTING STARSHIPS AND LASER GUNS GOT IT WRONG. WE NEVER GOT THOSE THINGS" NEAL STEPHENSON

"By 1994, I had been working at Microsoft for a couple of years," Abrash wrote when he first joined Valve, the company he worked for directly before Oculus VR. "One evening that year, while my daughter was looking at books in the Little Professor bookstore on the Sammamish Plateau, I happened to notice *Snow Crash* on a shelf. I picked it up and started reading, decided to buy it, and wound up devouring it overnight. I also started thinking to myself that I had a pretty good idea how about 80 per cent of it could work right then, and wanted to implement it as badly as I had ever wanted to do anything with a computer – this was a full-on chance to make SF real."

A little over 20 years later, Abrash is poised to finally realise that ambition, and Stephenson is right there beside him. In December last year, Stephenson was unveiled as the 'chief futurist' at an enigmatic start-up called Magic Leap, whose technology can allegedly make virtual 3D objects appear that are indistinguishable from the actual objects. The effect was impressive enough for Google to offer more than $500 million in funding, but Stephenson was somewhat sceptical. Then, just as the summer of 2014 was drawing to a close, four representatives from Magic Leap made Orcist, the legendary sword from JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, appear on his front-room table. He could scarcely sign the contract quickly enough.

Perhaps it is too much to expect a writer to intuit the events and trends of the future. After all, Stephenson said it himself, and he's come as close to doing just that as any science fiction author to emerge since. The difference is that in his new role at Magic Leap, Stephenson is perfectly placed to give it a nudge in the right direction.

"All the SF authors who had been predicting starships and laser guns got it wrong. We never got those things," he told *The Guardian* back in 2004. "They didn't predict ubiquitous computers. And so it is an interesting exercise to go back and look at history now that we know just what a big deal information technology turned out to be. If you want to call that a hacker perspective, fine. But the fact is that you and I are doing this interview on email. We're living in a society that's been transformed by information technology in too many ways to enumerate. So the hacker perspective isn't just the point of view of a few geeks; it is everyone's now."



Stephenson is looking to make his writing a reality via his role at futurists Magic Leap.



The rise of Facebook has been just one of the eventualities *Snow Crash* foreshadowed.

Your Take On The Classic

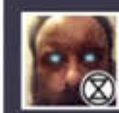
WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"Snow Crash is the book that cemented Neal Stephenson as my favourite contemporary author. Nowt since has changed that! #BookClub" **@spoonoftweets**



"Snow Crash is a reference of cyberpunk, exciting and full of ideas and a great way to discover Neal Stephenson. :-) #BookClub" **@AdolfoRT**



"A copy can be spotted in the superb movie Pontypool - which it shares similar themes with #BookClub" **@doctorfodder**



"Fabulous book, opened my eyes to the potentials of cyberpunk and an illustration of what science fiction could be #bookclub" **@TheCrowLady**



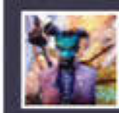
"Ahhhh... Early 1990s reading 1st print of Snow Crash + listening to FNM's Angel Dust = Imagination euphoria. Excellent CyBeRpUnK #BookClub" **@FiniteComic**



"Really slick & fun. Sometimes gets bogged down in linguistic theory but still good. Wish I had a RadiKS skateboard that's for sure #BookClub" **@ERRRskate151**



"One of my faves. Come on, who doesn't wish they could walk around with two swords strapped on their back? #BookClub" **@w3rdn3rd**



"It was SO GREAT #BookClub" **@MsCrisis**

What do you think? Let us know on Twitter or Facebook



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PHILIP PULLMAN

Get to know Philip Pullman and his dark material

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

Philip Pullman's back catalogue of nearly 20 books is mostly aimed at children – he worked as a school teacher for several years before becoming a writer – but his stories about everything from magic, cursed rubies and fireworks to daemons and armoured polar bears have captivated avid readers from all age groups.

Pullman was born in Norwich in 1946, and has since been something of a globetrotter, his family having taken up residence in England, Zimbabwe and Australia before settling in north Wales. When it came to university, Pullman decided to read English at Exeter College, Oxford, but found he didn't really like the subject, and graduated with a third class BA. 40 years on, *The Times* named him one of the 50 greatest British writers since 1945.

His most famous works – the fantasy series *His Dark Materials* – have been sold by the millions all over the world. As well as gaining legions of fans, the books have also won claimed actual awards, including *The Guardian* Children's Book Award, the Carnegie Medal and the Eleanor Farjeon Award for children's literature in 2002. The third book in the series, *The Amber Spyglass*, also won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, which was the first and last time the prize has ever been given to a children's book.

Pullman's interest in literature doesn't stop at writing; he has also been quite vocal about book-related issues over the years, and has become an enthusiastic campaigner. In 2008, he led a campaign against the introduction of age bands on the covers of children's books, as he believed it limited growth in children's curiosity for literature. Last year, he joined the 'Let Books Be Books' campaign to stop children's books being labelled 'for girls' or 'for boys' for similar reasons.

From *His Dark Materials* to beyond, Pullman remains a vital and much-loved author.



Lyra walked all over the furniture, but not the box office.

Which author would you like to see tackled next?

Let us know on Twitter or Facebook

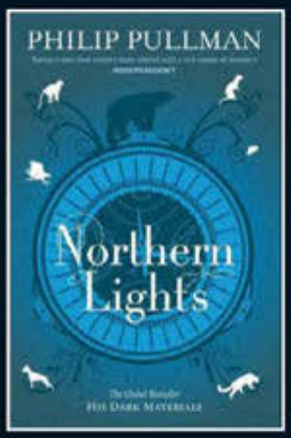
©REX

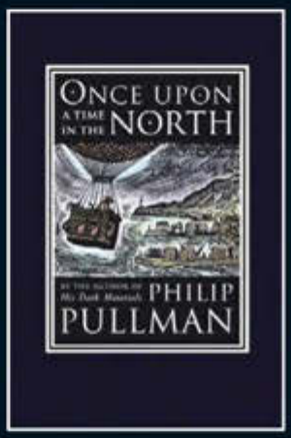


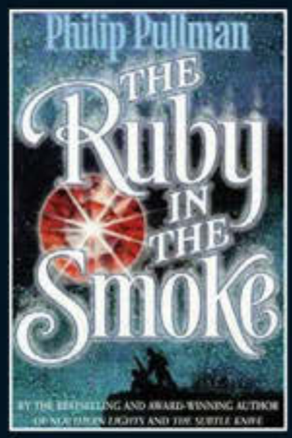
The Northern Lights' film adaptation *The Golden Compass* was a bit of a letdown.

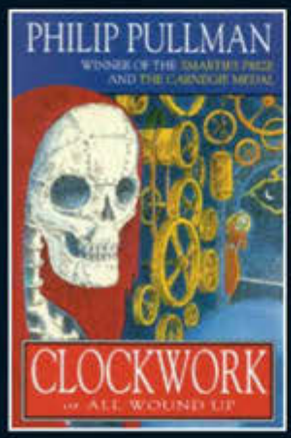


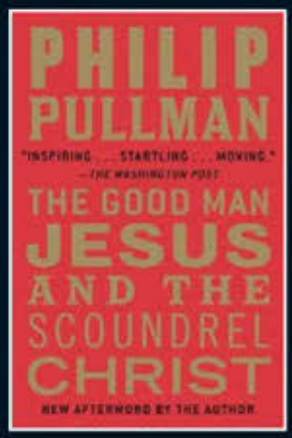
Doctor Who star Billie Piper led the cast of the BBC version of *The Ruby In The Smoke*.











Inner daemons

The weather outside is frightful

NORTHERN LIGHTS
Publisher: Scholastic Point
Published: 1995
Price: £3.99

Lyra Belacqua, a carefree orphan, lives in Oxford in an alternate world where every person is protected by their daemon, a creature that acts as a manifestation of their soul. When children around her start disappearing, Lyra takes it upon herself to find out what's going on. It turns out the children are being used in terrible experiments to separate humans from their daemons. It's the first in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and though the 2007 film didn't do too well, the book series is still popular.

"Never read anything like it, and managed to read it before most, so I felt like I'd 'discovered' it."
@MrFattyC

Lyra banks a prequel

"On Ilkla Moor Baht 'at, how's that?"

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE NORTH
Publisher: Scholastic Point
Published: 2006
Price: £12.99

Pullman keeps the magic of *His Dark Materials* alive with a collection of companion books. *Once Upon A Time In The North* acts as a prequel to the series, and documents Lyra's first meeting with her friend Lee Scoresby. After winning a hot-air balloon in a poker game, Lee decides to head north, but it's not long before he gets mixed up in a deadly plot. It's very short but beautifully illustrated, and comes with a board game tucked away in the back cover.

"Love all his dark materials books – read all three #BookClub"
@tweetworld74

Smmmmokin'

Rubies are a girl's best friend

THE RUBY IN THE SMOKE
Publisher: Oxford University Press
Published: 1985
Price: £7.99

The Ruby In The Smoke is the first novel in Pullman's Victorian, action-packed series, *The Sally Lockhart Quartet*, and documents 16-year-old Sally's dealings with an anonymous letter and a blood-soaked jewel after her father dies under mysterious circumstances. It was originally written as a school play, but Pullman rewrote it into a children's book series. In 2006, it was adapted into a TV movie that starred Billie Piper, Julie Walters and a pre-*Doctor Who* Matt Smith.

"Fantastic opener to a great series. Ideal for all ages, with excellent messages for the young and a brilliant female hero."
@karlhughes001

Tick tock, tick tock

Rage against the machine

CLOCKWORK
Publisher: Doubleday
Published: 1996
Price: £5.99

Clockwork may be a children's fairy tale, but it's still pretty heavy and filled with irony and suspense. The story serves as both a metaphor for the idea that society is sacrificing humanity in order to become a warning about the dangers of industrialisation and capitalism. It's largely based on a quote from Thomas Carlyle's *Signs Of The Times*: "Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand." As if all that isn't enough to make you feel inadequately stupid, the novel was also adapted into a children's opera not once, but twice.

"It's a thrilling tale with hints of the Brothers Grimm. Perfect for kids and adults who enjoy haunting fairy tales."
@SarahJAJones

Jesus wept

Forgive me Father, for I have sinned

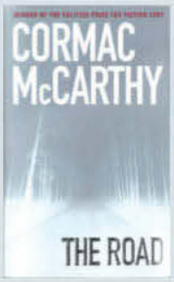
THE GOOD MAN JESUS AND THE SCOUNDREL CHRIST
Publisher: Canongate Books
Published: 2010
Price: £8.99

Jesus is a moral, impassioned and godly man. His brother Christ is a bit of a bastard who wants to use Jesus' legacy to found a powerful church. Pullman is well known for quite being outspoken when it comes to religion (he's a massive atheist) and this is basically a retelling of the bible, so it goes without saying that *The Good Man Jesus And The Scoundrel Christ* isn't for everyone. Some think it's blasphemous, while others think it's stellar. You'll just have to judge for yourself.

"Started it, got distracted and didn't go back to it #BookClub"
@tompl

Your Apocalypse Survival Notes

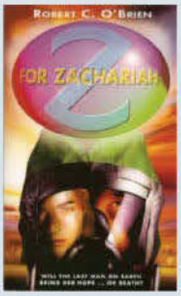
CHOOSE YOUR TOP FIVE @SCIFINOW ON TWITTER



1. The Road

Cormac McCarthy

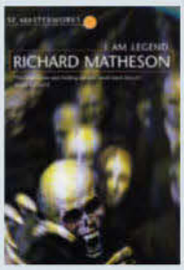
"*The Road*. Harrowing, brutal, but astounding. Probably an obvious choice, but still, stands out. #BookClub"
@WriteJoeWrite



2. Z For Zachariah

Robert C O'Brien

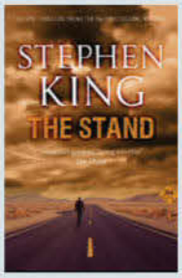
"I remember years ago reading *Z For Zachariah* and loved it. #BookClub"
@BeccaMorgs



3. I Am Legend

Richard Matheson

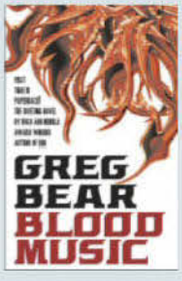
"*I Am Legend*, because it's both scary as hell and a tragic story of survival at the same time."
@Evazorek



4. The Stand

Stephen King

"*The Stand* by Stephen King. Another obvious choice, but an engrossing read. #BookClub"
@NigelStone2



5. Blood Music

Greg Bear

"*Blood Music* by Greg Bear. Brain meltingly inventive end to all things. #BookClub"
@doctorfodder

Details **Author:** Benjamin Percy **Publisher:** Hodder & Stoughton Ltd **Price:** £17.99 **Released:** 9 April

THE DEAD LANDS

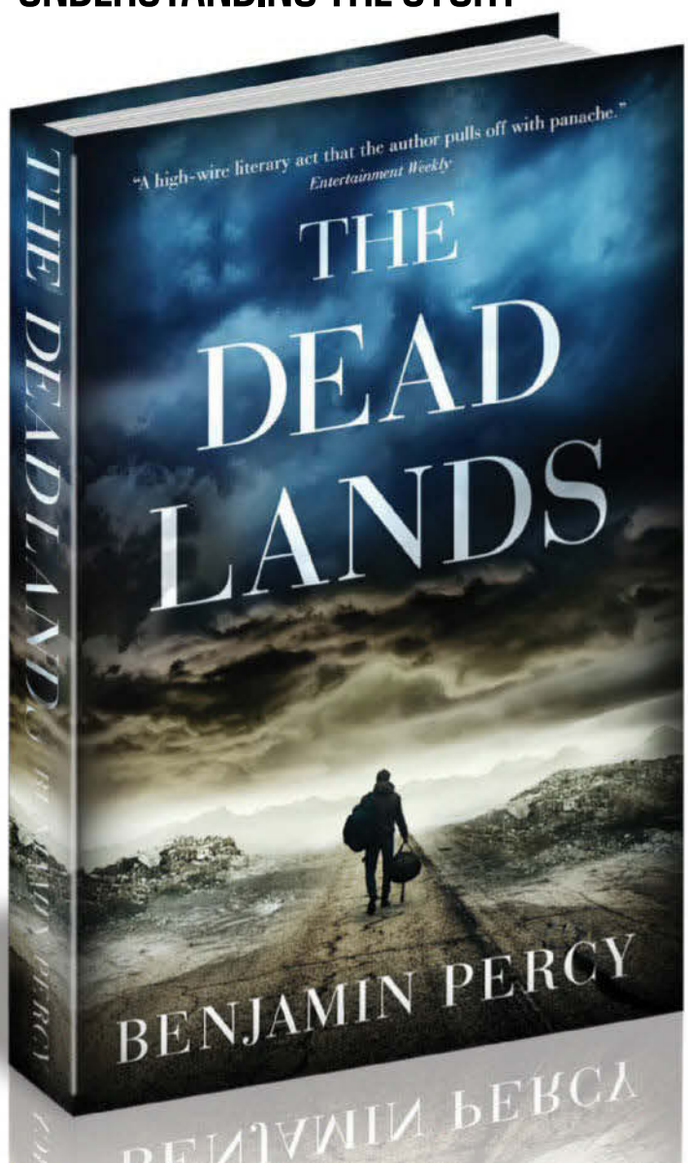
Don't open; dead outside

To borrow a phrase from *Battlestar Galactica*: all this has happened before, and all this will happen again. *The Dead Lands* is set in a post-apocalyptic future after disease and nuclear war have ravaged the planet, but the epic journey its characters go on is a recreation of a historical one.

In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition sets off from St Louis, Missouri on a scouting mission to stake out new territory in the western United States, making it all the way to the Pacific coast before retracing their steps to report back to President Jefferson. So in Benjamin Percy's novel, Lewis Meriwether and Wilhelmina Clark also set out on a voyage of discovery across western America.

But where the real Lewis and Clark had to deal with uncharted countryside, wild animals and hostile Native tribes, their fictional counterparts have to find a path through bombed-out cities, terrifying genetic mutations and savage bands of survivors. Also, they're not setting out on a government backed expedition – they're fleeing the tyrannical mayor of the Sanctuary, the walled fort that the future St Louis had to become to escape the plague.

"THE HISTORICAL PARALLELS ARE INTERESTING, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING THE STORY"



The historical parallels are interesting, but by no means essential to understanding the story. It's your standard dystopian stuff: having destroyed the world, the dregs of humanity painfully recreate social hierarchies in miniature so that the rich and powerful stay well fed and everyone else starves to death. Percy uses some particularly gruesome imagery to get his point across, so if the themes feel a little over-familiar at times, well, they've rarely been expressed in such a visceral way.

Divided into four parts, each devoted to a different stage of Lewis and Clark's journey, this is a pretty hefty book, and Percy gives himself plenty of characters to play with. The expedition party is made up of six main characters, each of who is given space for his or her own motives and emotional arc. And then there's what feels like an entire city back home, and a new colony over the horizon. The sheer number of different viewpoints gives weight to the novel, and the number of characters also means Percy is free to kill off (almost) any of them at any point. That, more than any description of giant spiders, makes the world of *The Dead Lands* feel genuinely dangerous.

Sadly, the ending is a pretty damp squib. In another *Battlestar Galactica*-ism, when the characters finally reach the end of their long journey, what's waiting for them is inevitably disappointing. And shoving an unlikely epilogue onto the end doesn't make it any more satisfying for the reader. There are ideas in this book – stacks of them – but not many of them actually go anywhere. Characters get forgotten or written out abruptly, and weapons are disposed of harmlessly.

By the end, what you're left with is the depressing impression that history will keep rolling on, people will never change, and an awful lot of endeavour is pointless. Not exactly cheery stuff, is it?

Sarah Dobbs

VERDICT ★★★☆☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Stand
Stephen King
Another massive novel about a deadly flu virus and the horrific journeys endured by its survivors.

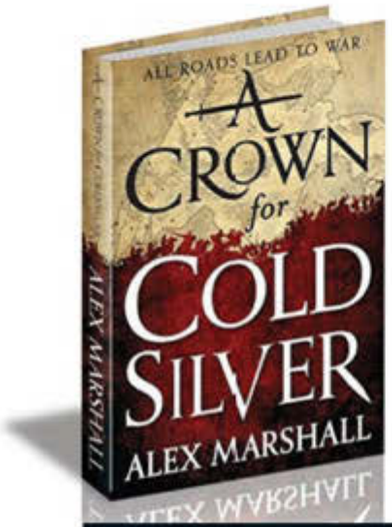
Details **Author:** Alex Marshall **Publisher:** Orbit **Price:** £16.99 **Released:** 14 April

A CROWN FOR COLD SILVER

SciFiNow Must read now!

All the Queen's villains

In a divided land brought tentatively together under the new reign of the Crimson Queen and the religious support of torture enthusiasts, Cobalt Zosia looks to topple the new queen and wreak vengeance on those who have wronged her by reuniting her former war allies. This is a full-on devil-summoning, pipe-smoking, dagger-wielding brutal quest fantasy, then. While it sounds like a rather familiar tale, *A Crown For Cold Silver*'s world is a joy to fall into for reasons beyond recognisable revenge plots.



For those bored to tears of books filled with heterosexual men, the book is a refreshing break, providing a range of realistic and varied characters more concerned with political affiliation and race than gender or sexuality. The characters are well-written, from the battle-hardened Stricken Queen to her five Villains, though a few jarring notes hit in the form of slang from a handful of the younger characters. Still, for the most part it expertly pulls off the combination of accessible modern language (ie a sugarload of swearing) and more familiar fantasy language, giving a realistic edge to all the talk of devils, animal people and oh-so many kinds of inebriating substances.

It's unfortunate, then, that this information comes so fast. While setting up *A Crown For Cold Silver* to be a much easier read a second time around, it can be a little distancing to have such a variety of unfamiliar terms thrown at you in such quick succession. However, it is a great read, and as more details reveal themselves along the way, we'd have loved to have spent more time in the casual company of its players. Cities, provinces, characters and political groups are thrown around so casually that while it does create a realistic world, it is one that the reader can feel a little bombarded by.

Overall, though, the multi-faceted quests of the several individuals the book follows are gripping, and will suit any quest-lover looking for a new addiction.

Rebecca Richards

VERDICT ★★★★☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Illusion
Paula Volsky
A political fantasy with a more singular narrative, it follows through a time of social unrest.

Author: EJ Swift **Publisher:** Del Rey **Price:** £8.99 **Released:** Out now

TAMARUQ

SciFiNow Must read now!

The secret is out

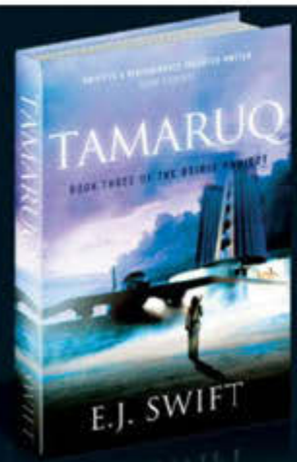
Thank goodness for conclusions. If ever a trilogy needed a strong finish it's *The Osiris Project*. Anyone who has had the strength to struggle through the first two books in the series will jump for joy at the sheer beauty of this finale, and not just because the end is nigh; *Tamaruq* really is a revelation.

When we last saw Adelaide Rechnov in book one, she was abandoning her privileged life in favour of rebellion. *Tamaruq* picks up her story soon after her escape to the west, targeted by the revolution. As a valuable asset, she finds herself privy to the shocking secret of Osiris, the lost city. But this is not just Adelaide's story; there are other characters to follow up and new ones to meet.

EJ Swift chooses to introduce multiple view points as the narrative switches perspectives and mode. Anonymous diary entries and video messages serve to keep the story grounded within its own world, as well as intensify the mystery.

The redfleur epidemic of book two continues its horrific journey. Vikram's survival of the killer disease is of major interest to various factions, and he is soon a wanted man. The romantics among us may ponder the fate of Vikram and Adelaide, but to reveal anything of the star-crossed lovers would be a disservice to both reader and writer, so lips remained firmly sealed on this matter.

Tamaruq is not a book to be attempted solo – the journey would be fraught with peril – but if you can survive the first couple of necessary miles, you will be rewarded when you reach your destination.



Claire Nicholls

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Abyss Beyond Dreams
Peter F Hamilton
A self-proclaimed prophet visualises a lost civilisation, leading him into a void.

YOUR READS

What you lot have been reading this month



"Just finished #*GhostStory* by @peterstraubnyc really intense with a really intriguing ending. Can't recommend enough #BookClub" **@Cascararogue**



"Currently reading #*Pygmy* by #ChuckPalahniuk ... difficult start but completely hooked! #BookClub" **@spokar**



"*Forsaken* by Kelley Armstrong, it is brilliant as are all her books! #BookClub" **@quidditysea**



"*After The Ending* by Lindsey Fairlight n Lindsey Pogue. It's extremely gripping n has different writing styles. Which I like. #BookClub" **@lil_mis_dx**



"Just in the middle of *Mystery Of Edwin Drood*. Not read it before. Not bad – even though I won't find out the ending! #bookclub" **@TheCrowLady**



"Just finished Robert Bloch's *Psycho* and now on Del Toro and Hogan's *The Fall*. #bookclub" **@wordsrmagic2me**



"*The Emperor's Blades*, by @BrianStaveley it's really good. Great characters and interesting setting. #BookClub!" **@Evazorek**



"Currently reading *The Miniaturist*. It's creeping me out and I love it. #BookClub" **@EffingRainbow**



"*The Bone Clocks* by David Mitchell. Pretty good so far. #BookClub" **@Harlegator68**



"*Jurassic Dead*, again. Zombies and dinosaurs? What's not to love? #BookClub" **@robbrichardson**



"*Mayhem* by @SarahPinborough. It's creepy as Hell. Love it! #BookClub" **@Tim_M_Matthews**



"*Dance With Dragons* book 2. GRRM had been padding out the story a lot but things are starting to pick up again. #BookClub" **@Captain_Revo**

Tell us **what you're reading** on Twitter or Facebook

60 SECONDS WITH

CM Pendleton



How would you pitch *A Dark Tyranny*?
A Dark Tyranny is primarily a traditional fantasy. I see it as a bridge between those that don't read fantasy and those that love the genre. It's written to not intimidate a non-fantasy reader, yet fulfill what standard fantasy readers are expecting. Book one is largely about survival and discovery. The world of Ehlür is at war. The smallest continent of Ehlür is Altaris. They have been spared from most of the world's conflicts, due to their isolated location. They are very much like the US at the beginning of WWII. The key is to survive the initial onslaught, regroup, and discover why the world is even at war.

Have you always been drawn to fantasy?
I grew up reading fantasy. I love other genres, but fantasy has always had a soft spot in my heart. I don't see myself as writing only fantasy. However, I do see this series moving forward for quite a while.

Did you start it with the idea that it was the first of a series?
I always envisioned this as a series. It is a story that just won't fit in one book. I'm getting a lot of reader requests for standalone books about various characters.

"WRITE A FANTASY BOOK THAT YOU WOULD WANT TO READ. THEN, EDIT IT"

It's an interesting idea that I like. The world of Ehlür will keep me busy for some time.

Did you have any specific inspirations while writing the novel?
I'm inspired by tons of different people. Bernard Cornwell's *Saxon Tales*, Stephen King's advice to writers, and Arturo Perez-Reverte's ability to inject historical fact into his mysteries. My wife gave me a book by Richard Cohen about the history of the sword that was amazing. There are so many people. I wish I could list them all.

What advice would you give first time authors embarking on a fantasy series?
Write a fantasy book that you would want to read. Then, edit it into a fantasy book others would be willing to buy. You should have confidence in your writing and story.



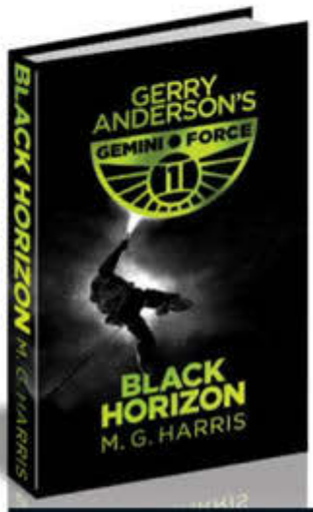
A Dark Tyranny by CM Pendleton is available now on Amazon.

Details **Author:** MG Harris **Publisher:** Orion **Price:** £7.99 **Released:** Out now

GERRY ANDERSON'S GEMINI FORCE ONE: BLACK HORIZON

Stingray + Thunderbirds = GF1

Before the late, great, supermarionation genius Gerry Anderson passed away he began working on a project that would not require visible puppet strings, part time hand actors or creepy green rings. This new international rescue squad were to be introduced to the world not by the medium of supermarionation, but via the pages of a novel.



The action in the first of the *Gemini Force 1* series, focuses mainly on youngster, Ben Carrington, born of wealthy, adventurous parents, he has never had to worry about money or his future. Until, his father tragically dies in a freak climbing accident leaving a beautiful widow and bewildered son at the mercy of the even more wealthy and slightly letchy Jason Truby. Truby persuades the grief stricken pair to join his elite but super top secret rescue team and before you can say "Spectrum is green" they are off saving lives. That is, of course, if Ben can prove himself first.

In true homage to Jeff Tracy et al, the *GF1* team live on a base hidden by a Caribbean reef, wear matching outfits and fly a bunch of ludicrously complicated aircraft, one is even a futuristic, pimped up version of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang!*

GF1 is slap bang up-to-date, perfect for it's gadget savvy, young target audience. The rescue missions are exciting although a bit too detailed to fully visualise the action, this may waste some valuable reading time as you re-read in an attempt to work out what the dickens is actually happening.

There is no mistaking the origin of this new and fearless rescue squad and a legacy lives on thanks to the dedication of Anderson's son, Jamie Anderson, a whole heap of devoted fans and the penmanship of author, MG Harris. *Gemini Force 1* hits the bookshops two years after Anderson's sad passing.

Claire Nicholls

VERDICT ★★★☆☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Joshua Files
MG Harris
A UFO geek suspects his father has been abducted by aliens, he unearths a world ending prophecy.

Details **Author:** Ian Tregillis **Publisher:** Orbit **Price:** £8.99 **Released:** Out now

THE MECHANICAL

The cogs of revolution

In a world where self-aware servants have taken on all the menial roles of everyday life, one 'Clakker' witnesses something new: a mechanical who stands up to his masters.

Such is the hook for Ian Tregillis' alternative-history fantasy *The Mechanical*, an original approach to a well-known subject matter; human ethics and free will. But instead of flinging us into space, Tregillis goes into the past and alters the flow of history from before the Industrial Revolution. In his world, the world view of Christiaan Huygens and the politics of the Netherlands have emerged victorious from the tumult of the Renaissance and subsequent struggle between reason and revelation, resulting in the world of *The Mechanical*.

And it is a fascinating world indeed. Although populated in part by archetypical characters and sometimes rote plot devices, by injecting dollops of alchemy and a dash of Old-World royal jostling into his unique version of the rise of the machines, *The Mechanical* is very much its own entity.

Tregillis is a capable sculptor of narrative. He rarely drags on in his descriptions, painting a complex picture of his world one section at a time. He imbues most characters with a specific internal voice, ably switching between points of view without it ever jarring. And the central character, a Clakker known as Jax, is the most engaging automaton you'll encounter in any recent book.

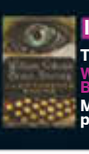


SciFiNow Must read now!

This opener to the *Alchemy Wars* trilogy delivers a mostly fresh breath of sci-fi fantasy.

Erlingur Einarsson

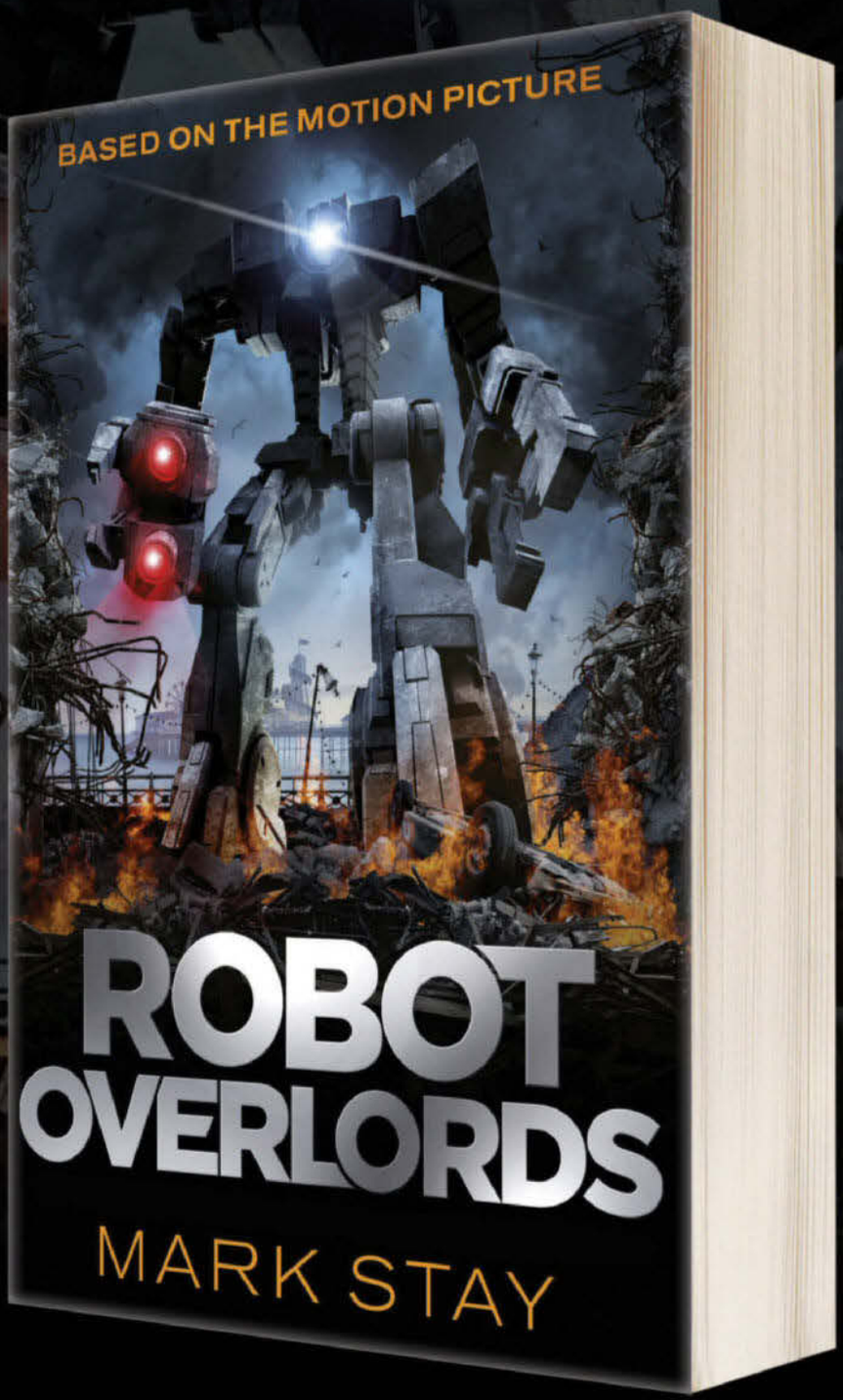
VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Difference Engine
William Gibson & Bruce Sterling
Madness and Wellington are paired in this novel.

Stay in your homes.
THIS IS NOT A DRILL.



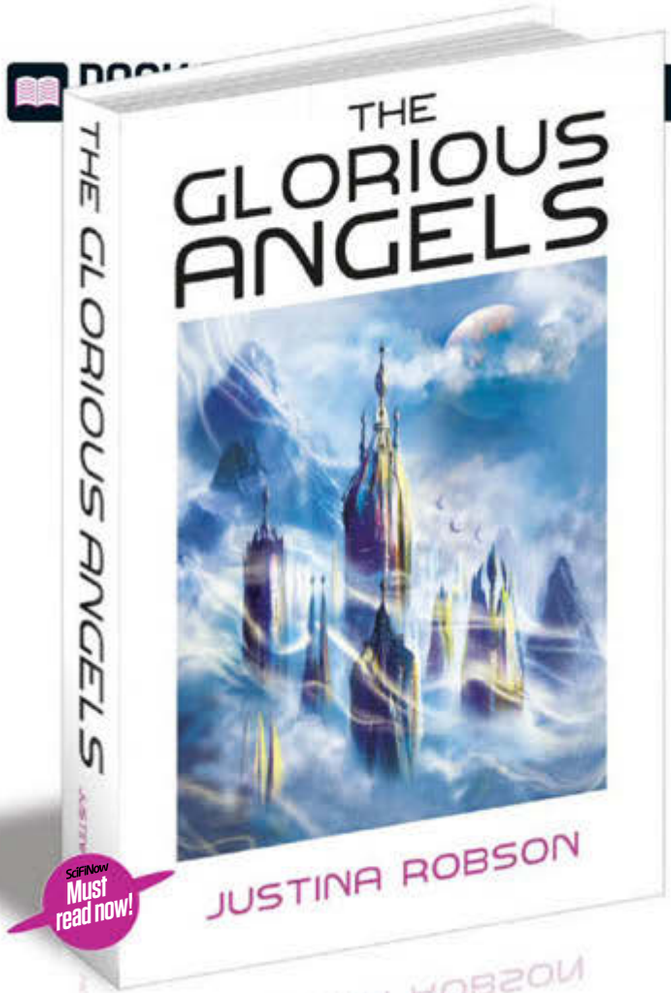
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Details **Author:** Justina Robson **Publisher:** Gollancz **Price:** £14.99 **Released:** Out now

THE GLORIOUS ANGELS

It's a woman's world

It's kind of hard to define where *The Glorious Angels* fits in with other sci-fi novels. That's not to say that it doesn't – it just stands out from so many others, not least for its unique matriarchal society.

Set in the empire of Glimshard under the reign of Empress, the story follows a series of characters as their city goes to war with an unknown enemy. Told from the perspective of multiple characters, from the Empress herself, to the spies and even an alien creature called a Karoo, the story is incredibly intelligent and well structured.

What's really fascinating about *The Glorious Angels* is the simple fact that it's a matriarchal world. It's not that women have usurped men; they're naturally more dominant. There's no resentment, and no assumption that it should be the other way round. It's really refreshing to see that this status of females doesn't have to be justified.

Despite its dominance of females, Robson doesn't rely on the stereotypes of each gender in her story. She delves into so many emotions and topics, including lust, romance, family and independence, but it's all grounded in reality and you never get the impression that the characters are shallow or incompetent.

It's a really tough read and requires attention and concentration in abundance to truly follow, but the characters are incredibly deep and personable, providing their own unique interpretation of situations as they occur. There's a real mix of emotions and ideas explored across the course of the book – all told from each character's point of view, seamlessly shifting from one perspective to another.

Despite its predominant theme, it's not a political commentary. What this book really does is tell an engaging, complex story, and it tells it well without condescending to stereotypes.

Philippa Grafton

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Gleam
Tom Fletcher
Set on the other side of the fence, Gleam follows Alan through the wilderness after he's expelled from his empire.

"WOMEN HAVE NOT USURPED MEN; THEY'RE NATURALLY MORE DOMINANT"

Details **Author:** Claire North **Publisher:** Orbit **Price:** £12.99 **Released:** Out now

TOUCH

The skin you're in

Last year, Claire North gave us the superb time-tripping novel *The Fifteen Lives Of Harry August*. Now, she returns with another story of almost-immortality and the price that must be paid for living at a remove from the rest of humanity.

Our narrator can jump from body to body, effectively possessing their host at the merest touch. She is hundreds of years old, but suddenly finds her life under threat when a shady organisation hunts her down. Now, the being known as Kepler must find a way to survive and figure out who exactly is behind the attempts on her life.

North throws the reader right into the midst of the action, picking up the story as Kepler barely escapes the body of her murdered host in Istanbul. She sets off on a journey across Europe, and the author vividly renders a succession of cities, train journeys and hotel rooms in incredible detail. Kepler's escape is interspersed with scenes from her history.

As with *Harry August*, North seems interested in the disassociation that comes from living too long, with Kepler one of the few romantics in a group of pleasure seekers and psychopaths. She creates scenes of affecting pathos, as well as some shocking violence (the exploits of the ghost known as Galileo are certainly memorable).

However, Kepler's narration is only intermittently involving; she's a lot easier to root for as a vengeful fugitive than a jaded sprite, while the present-day storylines are less exciting than her trips into the past. That being said, North is highly adept at finding small details that bring her world to life and the occasional lulls are quickly broken. *Touch* might not be as good as its predecessor, but it's an entertaining thriller that continues to showcase North's talent.

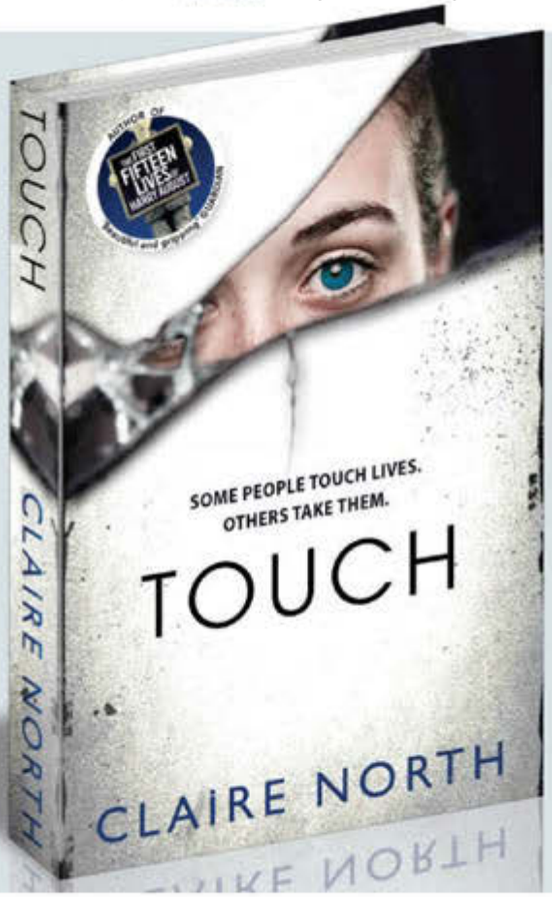
Jonathan Hatfull

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The First Fifteen Lives Of Harry August
Claire North
Tells the story of a man who repeats his life over again.



Patience Is A Virtue.

Much like its namesake from the savanna of Africa, the Leopard 1 in World of Tanks performs best as a lurking predator. It is equipped with the high penetration 105 mm Bordkanone L7A3, the most accurate gun in the game. It's firepower, paired with a superior view range and high mobility, makes the Leopard 1 an excellent sniper, quickly able to re-position itself to advantageous positions and outflank enemy lines.

In World of Tanks you can command the Leopard 1 from the driver's seat. World of Tanks is a PC online game dedicated to tank warfare in the mid-20th century with over 300 of history's most iconic tanks.

A variety of tiers, upgrades, equipment and decals allow you to make each tank, your progression and your gameplay experiences unique.

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"I WANTED TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE GERRY ANDERSON'S WORLD. NOW IT SEEMS I HAVE"
ALASTAIR REYNOLDS

Gerry Anderson saw the future

POSEIDON'S WAKE AUTHOR ALASTAIR REYNOLDS TALKS ABOUT THE PRESCIENCE OF GERRY ANDERSON'S SCI-FI AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A FUTURE YOU CAN BELIEVE IN...

WORDS **ALASTAIR REYNOLDS**

Here are some one-line plot synopses from a TV series set close to the present day.

After a military coup, a dictator misappropriates global aid funds to develop drone warfare technology to use against his own citizens. A stricken submarine ends up in the territorial waters of a Central American failed state, threatening to derail international peace talks. In a Middle Eastern Sultanate, a political assassination leads to a constitutional crisis, imperilling the progressive, democratic policies of the rightful successor to the throne. In the Arctic, a nuclear accident heightens an already tense East-West standoff...

Failed states. Democracies. Autonomous weapons. Middle East crises. Rising nuclear tension. The East and West at each other's throats.

Sound familiar?

This is the world of 2013 – or rather the world of 2013 as envisaged in 1968, when Gerry Anderson began making *Joe 90*, the last of his series to be based exclusively around supermarionation. Never as popular as *Stingray*, *Thunderbirds* or *Captain Scarlet*, *Joe 90* nonetheless remains strikingly prescient in its vision of a messy, mixed-up 21st Century, neither entirely good nor entirely bad, neither simplistic utopia nor grim-dark dystopia. The storylines may be rudimentary, and there's seldom any real sense of jeopardy in *Joe*'s adventures, and yes, it's puppets (you have to get past the puppets, I'm afraid), but the world presented here is a much closer fit to our present than that predicted by almost any other TV series of similar vintage.

No one wears shiny suits or shoulder pads. People wear normal clothes, live in normal houses or thatched cottages, they drive on normal roads with normal road markings and road signs. There's still a Dorset. They go on skiing holidays, fishing trips, attend piano recitals and so on. Even the vehicles, while futuristic, look perfectly plausible to modern eyes. Unlike *Star Trek*, which presented a flawless post-monetary future completely detached from our own, *Joe 90*'s future was built on the present. This was something Gerry Anderson got right in almost all his puppet shows – a sense that even decades hence, a lot of old stuff would still be hanging around, and while global institutions might come and go, the world would still be as busy and complex as it is in the present. There would still be money, and where there was money there would still be bank robbers and forgers.

The Anderson shows didn't necessarily share the same future, although it generally looked as if they did – but what they did share was a common idea, a unifying notion that for all the gadgetry and hardware, some things just won't change. It shouldn't be a radical notion, but it's one that Gerry Anderson alone seemed to really take on board. Of course, there are lots of things missing from the series – there's nothing like the internet, there are no digital media, there is no hint of climate change – and the race and gender politics is at times very dated, although no more so than in any other series from the same timeframe.

But the central triumph is that Anderson created a future you could believe in, rather than some idealised daydream of starships and warp drives. Even the world of *Captain Scarlet*, overshadowed by the ultimate War on Terror, is fundamentally our own. Apart from the Mysterons threatening to blow up stuff or assassinate people, life goes on for most people – as it does in ours. Much the same applied to *Thunderbirds*: unless you were caught up in the disaster of the week, the world of the Tracy brothers seemed a fairly liveable place, especially if you were stupidly wealthy and could afford to hang out in Monaco.

Thunderbirds is coming back, of course – this time it's *Thunderbirds are Go!* – and while I'm quite indecently excited at the prospect (can you tell I'm a die-hard Anderson fan?), I also hope that the new series doesn't stray too far from the spirit of the old. I'm not talking about puppets versus CGI, or whether the new vehicles look better or worse than the old – I mean the setting, the larger world in which the action takes place. I want that same sense of continuity with the present, looking forward but also acknowledging that the future will be just like now, only with more stuff. Anderson got that splendidly right in the Sixties, and by the time I came to his shows in the early Seventies – via battered old *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet* annuals, Dinky toys and the occasional blink-and-you've-missed-it TV re-run – it made the 21st Century seem exciting. I wanted to live long enough to see Gerry's world.

Now, it seems I have.



***Joe 90* was never as popular as Anderson's previous creations**



Virgil Tracy at the helm of Thunderbird Two. Will it be the same on its return?



Poseidon's Wake by Alastair Reynolds will be available to buy in hardback for £18.99 and eBook for £9.99 from 30 April, and is published by Gollancz.

Details **Writer:** The Original Writer **Artists:** Alan Davis, John Ridgeway and more **Publisher:** Marvel/Panini **Price:** £16.99 **Released:** Out now

MIRACLEMAN: THE RED KING SYNDROME

The Reign of the Superman



The debut superhero deconstruction from Alan Moore enters its second phase and loses its focus. While the first arc dealt with beer-gut no-mark Michael Moran discovering lost memories of being an ersatz Superman, *The Red King Syndrome* centres on the return of Nazi scientist Doctor Gargunza and the battle for Miracleman's unborn son.

Moore (a man who hates other people repeating his work) sticks Miracleman into a dream world that prefigures *For The Man Who Has Everything*, but this metatextual commentary on Fifties superhero comics is offset by the clumsy black caricature of government fixer Mr Cream, whose allusions to the racial tension in Thatcher's Britain are offset by conforming to reductive archetypes.

If the legal history is complex, the publication history isn't a great deal better, and *The Red King Syndrome* covers the end of the original *Warrior* run on the strip, picking up the story again with *Miracleman* #5-10.

The larger magazine-sized pages of *Warrior* seem more intricate when scaled down, while the colourisation from black and white left deep pits of shadow that suited the oppressive tone conjured by Moore's nail-worrying world view. Once the pages started being drawn for US format and drawn for colour, that incidental angst evaporated.

The art duties change hands too, with Chuck Austen taking over regular duties, but *Warrior* pros Alan Davis and John Ridgeway remain king in this volume, with the only seam being the latter's leery quality bringing genuine disquiet to every panel.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Astro City: Life In The Big City
Kurt Busiek/Alex Ross
The perfect antidote to the deconstruction, as Busiek and Ross return the 'wow' to the genre.





Details **Writers:** Dan Slott, Christos Gage **Artists:** Various **Publisher:** Marvel/Panini **Price:** £10.99 **Released:** Out now

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN: SPIDER-VERSE PRELUDE

Along came some spiders

Marvel are great at cross-time capers and shameless fan service.

If you shot your own secret blend of web fluid at the return of Spider-Man 2099's Miguel O'Hara in *Superior Spider-Man* and felt cheated by *Elseworlds* versions of Superman and Batman in DC's 2007 idiot-fest *Countdown: Area*, *Spider-Verse* promises to be your *Second Coming*.

Spider totem-hunting Morlun and his mystical spider-hunting family are now rampaging across the Multiverse, feasting on forgotten one-shot Spider-Men of *What If?*s past, while Superior Spider-Man is assembling a hit-squad to stop him.

From Peter Parquagh to Mayday Parker and the affable Pavitr Prabhakar, there's plenty of gleeful dusting down of Marvel's throwaway concepts, and frankly it's all tremendously good fun.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★★★☆



Details **Writers:** Craig Kyle, Chris Yost **Artists:** Carlo Barberi, Ed McGuinness **Publisher:** Marvel/Panini **Price:** £12.99 **Released:** Out now

AMAZING X-MEN: WORLD WAR WENDIGO

Maul of the wild

It may be set against the backdrop of Logan's impending death, but *Amazing X-Men* won't let anything get in the way of a good romp – this is the team that reunites *Amazing Friends* duo Firestar and Iceman, after all.

World War Wendigo takes Logan back to Canada to face the third party in his debut *Incredible Hulk* #180 (197x) grudge-match – the flesh-eating horror of First Nations mythology, the Wendigo.

The book is swarming with Wendigo, as well as his old running mates in superteam Alpha Flight. Strangely though, the most touching bits of character development come from reuniting X-Man Northstar with his Alpha Flight twin Aurora, with the exchange underlining just how far he's come – and just how far the rest of the Major Mapleleaf brigade haven't.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★★☆☆



Details **Writer:** Frederik Peeters **Artist:** Frederik Peeters
Publisher: SelfMadeHero **Price:** £10.99 **Released:** Out now

AAMA 3: THE DESERT OF MIRRORS

SciFiNow Must read now!

Space oddity

If Volume 2 was *Prometheus* as envisaged by Hayao Miyazaki, then Volume 3 is how his take on *2001: A Space Odyssey* would have looked.

As their constantly evolving alien landscape grows stranger and stranger, answers finally begin to materialise, but their delivery is torn straight from the white-room sequences in Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C Clarke's sci-fi masterpiece.

Events in the first volume are finally brought full circle as Verloc gets to the roots of his troubled relationship with his aloof and obsessive brother Conrad, the mysterious star child who is the spitting image of Verloc's estranged child breaks the silence, and the narrative reaches the 'present', where the series opened with its amnesiac protagonist and bare-legged ape-shaped robot.

The future, it seems, is yet to be written.

James Hoare
VERDICT ★★★★☆



Details **Writer:** Cullen Bunn **Artist:** Gabriel Hernandez Walter
Publisher: Marvel/Panini **Price:** £12.99 **Released:** Out now

MAGNETO: REVERSALS

They saved Xavier's brain



Very much ideal for fans of that brief sequence in *X-Men: First Class* where Erik is hunting down Nazis, Magneto's powers may have taken a hit (something something Phoenix Force), but his dedication to the cause is fiercer as he takes the fight to Red Skull, who has harnessed the power of Charles Xavier's dead grey matter in order to build an all-new mutant-hating super-Reich.

Part of the story (the very beginning and the entire middle) takes place over in *Uncanny Avengers*, so the escalation is disorientating. All of a sudden Red Skull is channelling obscenely powerful Onslaught and letting loose a host of Sentinels to fight the world's superheroes, while Magneto has somehow encouraged Doctor Doom, Carnage and assorted other supervillains to join the fight. Also, Deadpool because???

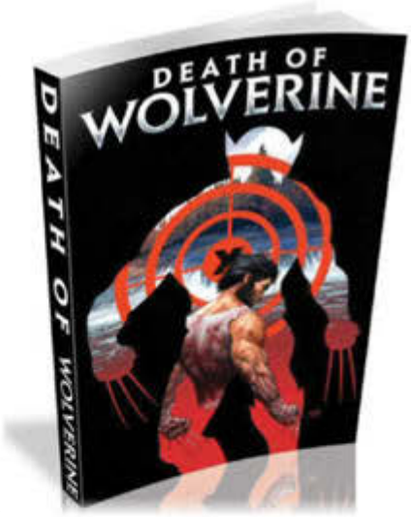
Artists Gabriel Hernandez Walta and Javier Fernandez may have introduced a more squat, pugnacious Erik than we're used to, an outsider on the edge, capable of who knows what?

James Hoare
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Details **Writer:** Charles Soule **Artist:** Steve McNiven
Publisher: Marvel/Panini **Price:** £8.66 **Released:** Out now

DEATH OF WOLVERINE

Logan's done



Finally, after months of foreplay from Paul Cornell, the main event has arrived. Wolverine is going to die for good – well, for a bit.

Best known for his powerful work on DC's *Swamp Thing*, writer Charles Soule has made an uneven impression on Marvel. There's the fan-pleasing *Thunderbolts*, the genre-defying *She-Hulk* and then there's absolutely abysmal *Inhuman*, so sunny optimism isn't unwarranted, but it should be definitely tempered with dark clouds of caution.

That, it transpires, is the correct stance. On the one hand, *Death Of Wolverine* returns to some classic Logan-centric storylines – the Weapon-X Project, his marriage to Viper and, perhaps most excitingly, body-hopping demonic sensei Ogun from the profoundly underrated *Kitty Pryde And Wolverine* miniseries. It's great fun, but that's pretty much all the character has been doing for the last couple of years (see *Astonishing X-Men* on the facing page). Soule does a fine job of setting up this final confrontation with all jaw-setting doing-what-needs-to-be-done of a Seventies movie cop on one last job, and this is echoed perfectly by Steve McNiven's art.

With Mark Millar's *Old Man Logan* and Ed Brubaker's *Captain America* in his sketch pad, McNiven is dab hand at ageing wardogs making stubborn points of principle, and his considered lines add weight to the events. His subtle redesign of Nuke alone deserves a shout-out, retaining his psychotic menace while evoking washed up, fading wrestlers.

If the art and the concept are worthy of being held up alongside the iconic Logan story arcs, than the awkward payoff – the final scene in particular – may well see it propelled into the opposite end of the canon, sitting shame-faced next to feral bandana mid-Nineties Wolverine and X-23's vile self-harming teen prostitute origin story.

James Hoare
VERDICT ★★★☆☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Wolverine: Enemy Of The State - Vol 2
Mark Millar/John Romita Jr
Logan's faced his fate before with a more satisfying climax.







The best of John Romita Jr

Daredevil: The Man Without Fear (1993)

This five-issue miniseries written by Frank Miller retells Daredevil's origin, and is reported to have influenced the new Netflix TV show.



SUPERMAN REDRAWN

Legendary comic artist John Romita Jr reflects on his first year drawing Superman, talks new powers and costumes, and looks ahead to his visit to the London Super Comic Con

WORDS **CHRIS ANDERSON**

If you follow his adventures in the comics, you'll know that Superman has had an eventful few months. One of the big talking points recently was *Superman* #38, on sale last month, which saw him unleash a new power that he did not realise he had on unsuspecting antagonist Ulysses. This reveal was followed by him donning a new costume – a tweaked version of the New 52 threads – and a major change in his relationship with pal Jimmy Olsen.

The issue was the final part of a story by superstar DC writer Geoff Johns and artist John Romita Jr, best known for his extensive work at Marvel, dating back to the Seventies. It could be said that Marvel was in his blood, with his father, John Romita Sr, the first artist to take over from Steve Ditko on *The Amazing Spider-Man* under Stan Lee. In later years, Romita Jr (who refers to himself as JRJR) forged his own relationship with the character, perhaps most famously in the December 2001 issue, where Spider-Man deals with the fallout of the September 11 attacks.

But Romita Jr has drawn just about every Marvel character there is, including the *Kick-Ass* series with writer Mark Millar. As the recent events in *Superman* prove, sometimes you need to shake things up, and when an opportunity to move to DC came along, working with Geoff Johns and inker Klaus Janson on such an iconic hero, it seemed like a change that was needed. It looks like it paid off too, as Romita Jr will no doubt reveal when he visits the UK for the London Super Comic Con this month.

You've been drawing Superman for almost a year now. How have you found it?
The whole process has been a lot of fun, and the editors and Geoff Johns have been a great pleasure to work with. What I had been concerned with, regarding the change in characters and the two companies, I thought it would be much more tumultuous, it wasn't… it was basically just a change in the type of costume I was drawing, and wasn't as big a move as I expected. I still got to do the same thing I'd been doing for the last 35 years.

It must have been strange switching companies after that time…
How it happened, I was interested in doing creator-owned properties at Marvel, similar to *Kick-Ass*, as I didn't want to just stick with the mainstream work. So I talked to them about it, but then my contract expired and we were having discussions back and forth. DC got in touch, and my wife, Kathy, had always been interested in me working there because she wanted to see the difference, and even my father signed off on it. He said, "Hey, don't just carry on working for Marvel, do what is best for you." A lot of other people were supportive, and while I wanted something new, I hadn't really planned on changing companies; it just happened. But I'm very happy, and I'm thrilled to be doing *Superman*.

How did it feel to draw the character first of all? He's been around for over 75 years…
I actually had a little bit of an anxiety attack the first time I did it, saying to myself, "I am drawing the oldest and most revered superhero in comics – there are so many guys who have done this before me. What am I going to do?" But literally the moment I first drew the cape, I thought, "Wait a minute, I've drawn a character with a cape before, this is kind of cool." So I felt a lot more comfortable. And the way you handle the character is not dissimilar to the way you might handle Thor, in terms of his power. Then it was just a matter of getting the jawline and the hair right.

> **THE CHANGES ARE PRETTY MINIMAL, AS IT'S SO ICONIC THERE ISN'T A LOT YOU CAN DO**
> JOHN ROMITA JR



The best of John Romita Jr

The Eternals (2006)
Romita Jr helped writer Neil Gaiman with this seven-issue mini-series that reintroduced Jack Kirby's Seventies characters to the modern Marvel universe.

You've drawn DC characters before, though – at Marvel you drew the cover for a DC/Marvel Crossover Classics trade paperback, and there was the *Batman Vs Punisher* special…
That's correct, and that's why I always imagined I would do Batman again at some point, but instead I'm doing Superman, the very character that I didn't care for several years ago because I thought he was just too perfect. But I found the ideas that Geoff [Johns] had were amazing.

They all seemed to come to fruition in *Superman* #38 with the new 'Super Flare' power and the costume changes. Were you part of all that?
The editors of the *Superman* books had been talking about it for a while and asking, "Couldn't we do something with Superman's powers, maybe show another side to them, something that manifests? It's not something we've shaken up in a while." So myself, Greg Pak, Gene Luen Yang, Aaron Kuder and Pete Tomasi threw a few ideas around, and along with Geoff [Johns] came up with an extension of his regular abilities [the flare is a powerful blast caused by Superman expelling all of the solar energy from his cells at once, discovered by accident]. The fact that it happened in the first story arc I worked on was pure luck on my side, but it'll play into all of the other books. His costume got destroyed by that, so he makes a new one with a few tweaks. The changes are pretty minimal, as it's so iconic there isn't a lot you can do. We just wanted to freshen it a little, and we did it at a point when the old one was damaged, so it makes sense.

This is a power that also weakens Superman after he uses it – no more solar energy means he is basically mortal for 24 hours until he recharges…
That's right. And it's Batman who tells him this when he wakes up in the Batcave,

which means I got to do a brief but vital appearance of a character I really wanted to draw again. That was very exciting, but it can be daunting to draw all of the Batcave.

You'll have other DC characters to draw soon, as Superman will be testing his new power against the Justice League in an issue you're writing. Is that correct?
He will be trying it out against the Justice League, yes. I know the basic idea for that issue, but not specifically which characters will be in it. At this stage, it's an idea we are still developing. That's #40, and I'm just finishing up #39 right now. But those two issues are the bridge to our next big story arc, and there will be repercussions from the changes we've introduced. A big change is coming up with Clark Kent/Superman, but I can't tell you about that yet. I'm plotting #40, I know that, and as far as doing the dialogue goes I'll see how the time works out.

That's the other recent announcement, of course, that Geoff Johns is leaving the book, to be replaced by Gene Luen Yang. What will he bring to the character?
I can't tell you, I have to keep my mouth shut [laughs]. All I will say is that the storyline covering all of the Superman books is in great hands. I just sit back and draw whatever they give me.

Are you upset about Geoff leaving? He has so many film and TV commitments, it must be hard for him to write comics…
These guys taking off for Hollywood, how can he choose [laughs]? I think he is still writing *Justice League*, though.

Working with him, did he ever tell you about what he had coming up? Did he show you the script for *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, for example?
He didn't, but I'm really looking forward to that. I think Ben Affleck is a hell of an actor,

> **IT'S A GENRE THAT HAS LONGEVITY, AND IF YOU HAVE IDEAS… YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN**
> JOHN ROMITA JR



The artist is excited at what's ahead for the likes of Spider-Man.

I think he'll pull it off. And honestly, people are asking me now, "How can it be Batman against Superman? Superman is going to tear his head off!" And I say, "You've got to watch it."

You must be excited about the Marvel/Sony deal too, allowing Spider-Man to star in some of the Marvel movies, considering your history with the character…
Yes, they are connecting Spider-Man to the rest of the Marvel universe onscreen, and I think that's great, I'm very happy for them. The fans have been waiting for that for a long time. Every superhero and comic-book has the ability to work well as a movie, and when it does then that's good for all of us. It's a genre that has longevity, and if you have ideas, the creative talent and the stories, you can make it happen as live action. It's something here for the long haul.

Wasn't Spider-Man your introduction to comics? When your father was drawing it, didn't you design a character, the Prowler, for him?
I came up with the name, but the costume I designed was so awful. Even Stan Lee in his pleasantness said [adopts Stan voice], "Hate the costume, love the name." So they kept the name, and he looked nothing like the version I did, but they did give me credit for it when I was 13.

One of your great *Spider-Man* stories was the 9/11 issue, addressing how the character felt about that happening in his city. Is it one that still resonates with you?
Yeah, it does. I have a hard time… honestly, I haven't even opened up that issue since about 2002. I can't look at it. I have the original artwork in my safe here and I don't know what I'm going to do with it. Maybe one day I'll donate it, perhaps to a 9/11 charity. But I don't know what to do with the artwork. I'm holding onto it, I've been offered amazing amounts of money for it, I can't conceive of selling it for a profit unless it's for an emergency, I don't know, I honestly don't know. But I can't look at it… it breaks me up.



Romita Jr has gained an even wider audience via his work on *Kick-Ass*.



The best of John Romita Jr
Kick-Ass (2008)
Before the original movie, Kick-Ass was just a miniseries with Romita Jr's art and Mark Millar's writing. Spawned two sequels and a *Hit Girl* prequel.



He has also presided over some interesting new changes to Superman.



The best of John Romita Jr
The Amazing Spider-Man Vol 2 30-58 (2001-03)
Romita Jr first drew Spider-Man in the Eighties, but teaming him up with *Babylon 5* creator J Michael Straczynski years later breathed new life into him.

But you're coming to the UK in March for the London Super Comic Con...
I am. I'm really looking forward to it. London is my favourite city in the world after New York, and I'll be walking around, seeing some friends after the convention...

And at DC, is the plan to stick with *Superman*, or will there be other projects?
I don't know. I know what I want to do, but what they allow me to do or embrace, we'll see what happens. There are a certain amount of issues that I intended to do on *Superman*, and I have about another year of those. I have couple of ideas I'd like to try, but I'd also like to stick with a regular monthly. Whatever keeps the guy writing the cheques happy [laughs].

John Romita Jr will be appearing at the London Super Comic Con from March 14-15 at the Excel Centre, London. For ticket info, see **www.londonsupercomicconvention.com**. *Superman* is published monthly by DC Comics – visit **www.dccomics.com** for more information.



The best of John Romita Jr

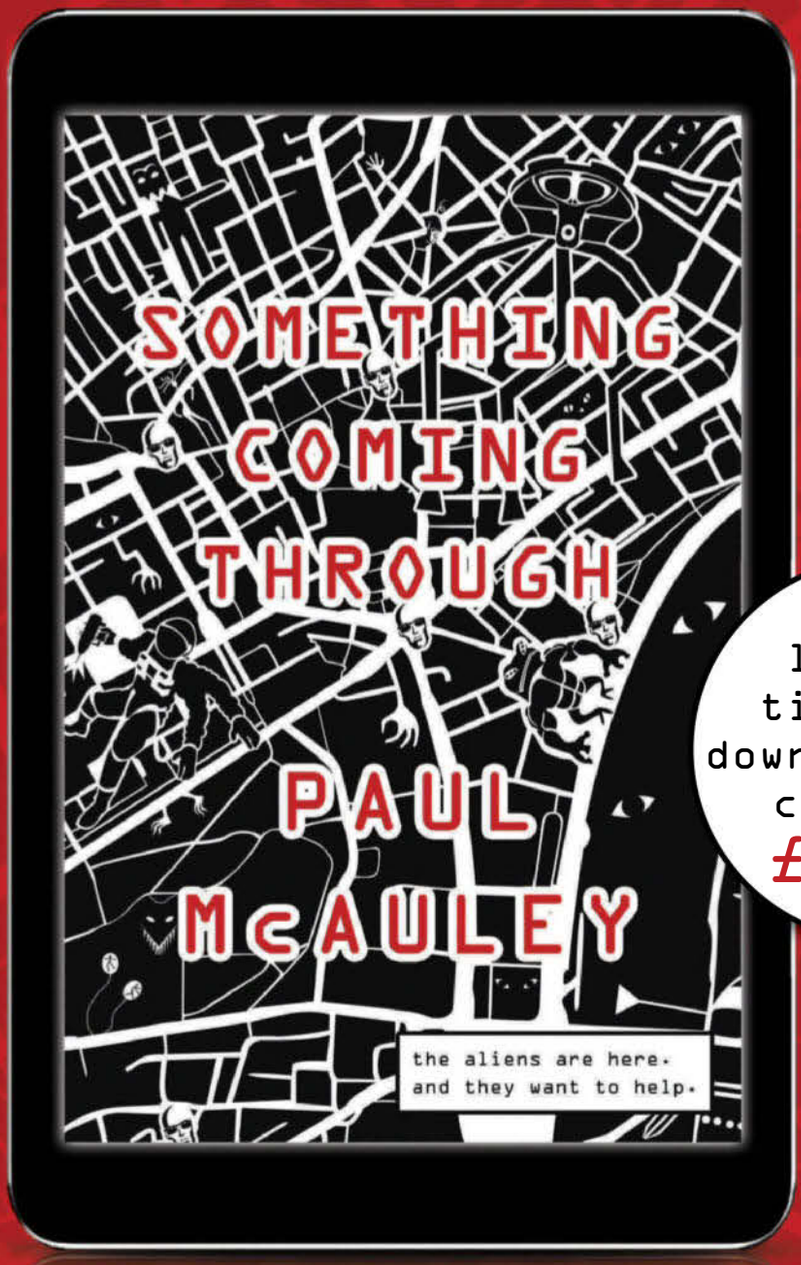
Wolverine: Enemy of the State (2004)
Writer Mark Millar teamed up with Romita Jr for a 12-issue run on *Wolverine*, where the character is brainwashed and sent to kill key Marvel characters.





Romita Jr's work seems to have encompassed most of comics' major characters.

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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO DARIO ARGENTO

THE VISCONTI OF VIOLENCE HAS BEEN AN ITALIAN HORROR INSTITUTION FOR OVER FOUR DECADES. THE 'LAST MAN STANDING' OF A COUNTRY THAT ONCE LED THE WORLD IN FEAR-FILMMAKING, WE HEAR FROM THE MAN HIMSELF AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES HOW HE DID IT…

WORDS **CALUM WADDELL**

Dario Argento remains many things to many people: a splatter-hack, maestro of the macabre, disgraced former genius and maybe even one of the most mesmerising mavericks of world cinema. Regardless, one thing is for sure: he is the sole voice remaining from the golden age of Italian horror films. Indeed, from the Sixties through to the mid Eighties, Italy was producing a plethora of crimson-caked classics that baited censors and attracted a fervent fan following. Following in the footsteps of Mario Bava, who instigated the trend for complex giallo shockers with *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963), Argento became the trend's most commercial name.

The son of the late movie producer Salvatore Argento, who oversaw his son's explosive debut *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* (1970) and many of his subsequent affairs, the protégé had a privileged upbringing. Furthermore, with a photographer mother, Elda Luxardo, who snapped some of Rome's top celebrities, Argento Jr was clearly not going to be taking on a 9-5 desk job anytime soon. Hobnobbing with the rich and famous, he was soon obtaining work as a film critic. Before long, he was employed as a scriptwriter for some of the country's most prolific talent.

"I think of Dario Argento as my pupil," begins Umberto Lenzi, who raised his own profile with such gut-crunchers as 1981's *Cannibal Ferox*. "He wrote my movie *Battle Of The Commandos* with Jack Palance, a war picture which was released in 1969. And then later on, he came to my set to watch me film a giallo I was making entitled *Orgasmo* – one of my best movies. He said he wanted to observe. Then, one year later, he makes *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage*. So if anyone asks me, I tell them that I may have been Dario's biggest influence!"

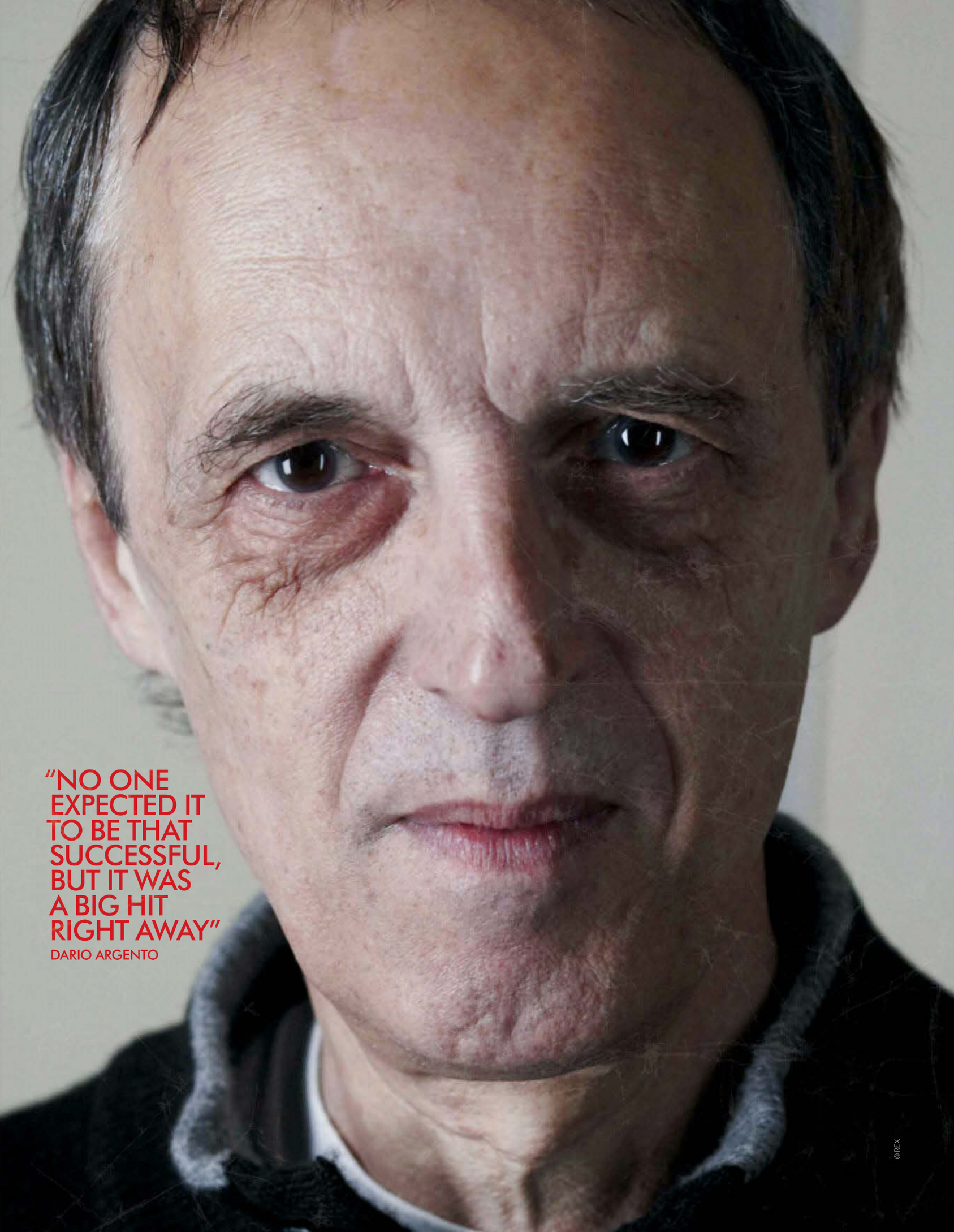
Yet, by this time Argento was already aiming above the B-movie budgets and sleazy set pieces that kept his slightly older contemporaries pigeonholed as auteurs of cheap and cheerful carnage. Having collaborated with future arthouse darling Bernardo Bertolucci to co-write Sergio Leone's classic *Once Upon A Time In The West* (1968), Argento had already been exposed to the Italian A-list. This doubtless helped with the lavish funds afforded to him for his own directorial debut in 1970.

"When we released *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* in America, it was number one at the box office for two weeks," begins Argento. "No one expected it to be that successful, but it was a big hit right away, and it played to large crowds everywhere, including in Italy. I think part of its appeal was that it had a new style. It was different from what Mario Bava had done, which was always a little more reserved. *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* started a genre of its own that the public now recognised as the giallo."

The word 'giallo' translates as 'yellow' in Italy (the covers of Agatha Christie novels, for instance, were awarded this colour to stand out on the country's bookstands). After this, Argento scored an even bigger hit with *Cat O'Nine Tails* (1971), which starred Oscar winner Karl Malden and became one of the biggest box-office draws of its year. In the wake of this classy cash-grabber, the director – with his ever-loyal producer-father – rushed out a third 'animal-themed' opus with *Four Flies On Grey Velvet*.

"By the time he got to his third movie, Dario felt under a lot of pressure to do something fresh," states Luigi Cozzi, the screenwriter of *Four Flies On Grey Velvet*. "The giallo was starting to become popular because young people were lining up to see the creative deaths, and Lucio Fulci and Sergio Martino were coming to prominence with their own versions. So now Dario felt that he had to top *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* and *Cat O' Nine Tails*, which were not so violent, with *Four Flies On Grey Velvet*. This is why we ended our picture with a graphic decapitation, and the audience loved it. Now, the other directors felt they had to increase the blood and violence even further, so the giallo was quickly becoming a new form of horror cinema."

Later, Argento branched out to co-write another western, *Man Called Amen* (1972) and helm his rarely seen period comedy, *The Five Days Of Milan* (1973).


"NO ONE EXPECTED IT TO BE THAT SUCCESSFUL, BUT IT WAS A BIG HIT RIGHT AWAY"
DARIO ARGENTO
©REX

TOP 10 DARIO ARGENTO FILMS

We recommend that you remember the good times with this essential list of his finest fear achievements…



1. THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE (1970)

A young American artist witnesses a black-gloved killer attempting to slay a young woman in a Rome art gallery. Chaos ensues. A finely tuned thriller with lashings of style, *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* remains one of Argento's best.



2. CAT O' NINE TAILS (1971)

A blind man (Karl Malden) and an American reporter (James Franciscus) attempt to solve a series of murders. Argento describes *Cat O' Nine Tails* as one of his lesser films. We disagree with that; *Cat O' Nine Tails* is definitely worth your time.



3. FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET (1971)

This conclusion to Argento's animal trilogy introduces an American musician (Michael Brandon) who accidentally stabs a masked man in self-defence. But photographs taken of the scuffle lead to a stalker who is closer to home than he thinks.



4. DEEP RED (1975)

Argento's giallo masterpiece, David Hemmings is yet another expat character in Italy (this time Turin) who sees a murder and becomes obsessed with locating the culprit. Edge-of-the-seat tension and stunning widescreen cinematography make this a terror tour de force.



5. SUSPIRIA (1977)

Arguably every bit as visually accomplished and ambitious as anything his compatriots Antonioni and Fellini achieved, *Suspiria* is a horror art-rock-opera that throws logic to the wind in favour of sheer style. It's one of Argento's leading – and most loved – works.



6. INFERNO (1980)

Not quite *Suspiria*, but almost as beautiful, this multi-coloured fairy tale of a witch's coven in Manhattan is perhaps second only to James Whale's *Bride Of Frankenstein* as outstanding horror sequels go. Just don't waste your time watching its prologue; *Mother Of Tears* is not worth your time.



7. TENEBRAE (1982)

Real life mimics art in this multi-layered slice of giallo genius, which depicts a trashy author becoming sucked into a series of femme-filleting murders. The final, shocking revelation, however, is what makes *Tenebrae* so special.



8. PHENOMENA (1985)

A notable drop in quality from *Tenebrae*, but *Phenomena* still provides plenty of beautiful visuals and a few good, sharp shocks. Jennifer Connolly, as a young rich girl with insect-stimulating powers, is one of Argento's worthiest heroines.



9. OPERA (1987)

Stylistically, *Opera* rivals both *Deep Red* and *Tenebrae*, but the cheap gore takes some of the class away from this otherwise brilliant giallo nightmare. It's also one of his last great works before he took a catastrophic nose-dive in quality in the Nineties.



10. TRAUMA (1993)

All but the most curious can probably refrain from delving into the Argento canon beyond *Trauma*. Flawed but still well above average, this American-produced giallo walks a thin line between tacky and terrific, but generally veers more towards the latter.

While the latter failed at the Italian box office, Argento maintained some genre status by producing his *Door Into Darkness* television series, and ultimately opted to return to the safety of the giallo format with 1975's *Deep Red*.

"Originally, *Four Flies On Grey Velvet* was going to start with a psychic medium that identifies a murderer in the audience," reveals Cozzi. "However, Dario felt, at that time, this would make the movie a little too supernatural. With *Deep Red*, though, he decided that not everything had to be totally logical in his films. Instead, he could play with the audience and try and evolve the entire genre by making the unexplainable interesting and exciting. In my opinion, *Deep Red* is his masterpiece. It changed everything and led to *Suspiria*, which has very little logic at all."

At this stage, a pattern was being set by the new Italian maestro of the macabre: wealthy male characters were, typically, placed in a scenario of abject threat and hunted by a bloodthirsty personality wearing black leather gloves. With *Deep Red*, the casting of Hemmings continued this trope. However, the addition of actress Dario Nicolodi as a curious journalist provided Argento with a further muse. Indeed, Nicolodi would go on to play a central part in the director's canon over the next decade, becoming his wife and the mother of his daughter, Asia. She would also, without credit, write the script for 1977's *Suspiria*, the film that, more than any other, established its creator as an international, and influential, genre artist.

"Whenever I start a new project, I know that *Suspiria* is the one I have to try and beat," admits Argento. "We shot the film in Technicolor, and even travelled to West Germany for some scenes. I wanted the movie to look hot, so the colours are very extreme. I took the same approach for the sequel to *Suspiria*, *Inferno*, which was also about a coven of witches. With *Inferno* I went back to having a male hero, but *Suspiria* was my first time presenting a female lead, and I think Jessica Harper, as the ballet student Suzy Bannion, remains one of my favourite characters."

Despite a sub-par theatrical fling in the US and a heavily censored UK bow, *Suspiria* further cemented Argento as a legitimate auteur. While his contemporaries such as Fulci and Lenzi were dismissed (however unfairly) as purveyors of sleaze, the man who made *Deep Red* and *Suspiria* was instead hailed as a genius – even if his splatter-drenched set pieces continued to bemuse those who detested horror. In addition, with 1980's follow-up *Inferno*, Argento's success continued. Unfortunately, distribution problems plagued its success.

"I think *Inferno* was too intellectual for American people," laughs Argento. "It had an enigma about it which I think they failed to grasp at the time. It was a difficult film for the original American distributor, 20th Century Fox, too. I remember seeing the film with the president of the studio, and he told me that he did not understand it. He actually said to me, 'I do not get the point of this movie, and I will not release it.' For this reason it never came out in the cinemas in America, but it was successful all over Europe, so I did not mind too much."

During this time in his life, Argento was more prolific and respected than ever. Acting as the (behind-the-scenes) European producer of George Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead* (1978), and successfully overseeing its release in Rome, he paved the way for future ventures such as Lamberto Bava's *Demons* (1985) and *Demons 2* (1986). In the meantime, a return to the giallo with Tenebrae (1982) saw Argento answer accusations of misogyny (*Suspiria* opens with the graphic double-death of two young female students) with a reflexive plot about a pulp book author who may or may not be involved in slaying a number of beautiful women.

Luigi Cozzi describes *Deep Red* as "a masterpiece".



***Suspiria* is perhaps Argento's greatest film.**



"WHENEVER I START A NEW PROJECT, SUSPIRIA IS THE ONE I HAVE TO TRY AND BEAT"
DARIO ARGENTO



COMPLETE GUIDE TO
DARIO ARGENTO

"I don't see any misogyny in my work," says the director. "When someone dies in these films it is just fake blood – be it a man or a woman, it is the just same to me. It is insane, because women commonly say to me that I am like an artist in regards to how I film them, but men say 'you are a misogynist.' It is always men telling me this [laughs]. I tell them no – they are wrong: it's just a scene in a movie. If a murderer kills a woman in my films it is because it is natural to them, they are maybe born like this, but it is not me personally. That is why I made *Tenebrae*."

Tenebrae plays with the theatrics of horror cinema and satirises both Freudian psychoanalysis (a favourite of the maestro) and postmodern feminism with a garish, gruesome relish. Clever and darkly comic, *Tenebrae* closes the golden age of Argento's work: had he never made another movie, there is a good chance that the Italian eccentric would have gone down as the one of the greatest European filmmakers of his time. Unfortunately, a slow downward spiral begun with 1985's *Phenomena*.

If *Deep Red* and *Suspiria* represented the beginning of a less linear approach to storytelling then they at least maintained their on-screen credibility through engaging characters and scenarios. Unfortunately, *Phenomena* all too frequently replaces slow-building stylisation, operatic ambition and colourful aplomb with gruelling gore, erroneous exposition and slasher-film silliness.

> "OPERA IS STRONG AND ONE OF MY MOST UNDERRATED PROJECTS"
> DARIO ARGENTO



Some see *Phenomena* as the point where Argento's movies took a dip in quality.

The same is true of 1987's *Opera*, a beautifully realised giallo that highlights some mind-melting camera callisthenics, but comes undone with some especially cruel slice-and-dice nastiness. Despite this, *Opera* feels like a last hurrah of sorts. A surprise Christmas flop in Italy, Argento would take his talents to America for *Two Evil Eyes* (1990), an acceptable Edgar Alan Poe collaboration with George Romero, and *Trauma* (1993), an above-average English-language thriller that nonetheless lacked the epic esotericism and eye-opening insanity of *Opera*.

In truth, Argento's decline can possibly be attributed to the departure of Nicolodi – whose often unmentioned role in script development and casting continued through to *Opera*.

"I was so sad when I shot *Opera*," reveals Argento. "It was a terrible time for me because of the break-up with Daria, and when I finished the film I was very depressed. I don't know if the movie was the main problem – but it was a really important moment in my professional career. It was my last movie in Italy for a little while, too. I do feel that *Opera* is a very strong film and one of my most underrated projects."

With *Trauma* sinking straight to video, things began to change. Rarely would an Argento release feature such trademarks as extravagant, multi-coloured moments of intense terror, blinding sets and costumes, swooping crane and dolly shots and imaginatively mounted widescreen cinematography. Initiating with *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996) – peddling a pedestrian TV-movie like aesthetic, grim but powerless moments of sanguine-splashed boredom and stories that built to inconsequential conclusions. In retrospect, it doesn't look nearly as bad as it did at the time, at least offering a memorable Ennio Morricone score and a decent first half, in which police inspector – and art-phobic – Asia Argento tracks a rapist murderer across Florence. However, the way in which the director films his daughter being sexually harassed becomes downright creepy, and the flat visuals never indicate that this is the same man who once hit such heights as *Suspiria*.

"I stand by *The Stendhal Syndrome*," says Argento. "I am aware that my fans were not so fond of it when it first came out. But even if they don't like *The Stendhal Syndrome*, I do – and that is what is important. I worked around some great architecture and paintings on that picture. It is a movie that is heavily influenced by my love of art, and it was a very good experience to make with my daughter Asia. She is a great actress, and now she is known worldwide. It is such an honour whenever she appears on screen and the audience cheers for her."

Unfortunately, *The Stendhal Syndrome* was so badly received that only Lloyd Kaufman's Troma would take

A young Jennifer Connelly was one star to show up in Argento's work.



Dario's daughter Asia would become a frequent collaborator.





***Inferno*, the sequel to *Suspiria*, was less well received.**





Argento's films were renowned for not holding back on gore.

up its direct-to-video distribution in the USA. Perhaps the lowest point of Argento's career up until that point, things didn't improve. The death of his closest rival, Lucio Fulci, prevented their long-awaited collaboration, *Wax Mask*, from moving forward. A quickly produced directorial effort in *The Phantom Of The Opera*, once again reuniting father and daughter, emerged in 1998, and proved to be another disappointment.

"I think there is a continuation between the older films and projects such as *The Stendhal Syndrome* and *The Phantom Of The Opera*," insists the director. "I love opera – the music and the spectacle of it – and art and architecture and Freud. Most of my films are dedicated to the arts. It is the same with *The Phantom Of The Opera*. If you see my films you cannot miss how carefully I study the architecture and design of cities, for instance. These things are the blood of my films, and that has never changed."

Thematically, Argento may believe that *The Stendhal Syndrome* and *The Phantom Of The Opera* honour the lineage of his genius, but the style had clearly changed, a factor made all the more evident by the flops that followed. Despite the great Max von Sydow signing on for 2001's giallo jaunt *Sleepless*, the badly dubbed and overly unpleasant consequence was once again robbed of coherence and colour. The end result was yet another bomb.



SUSPIRIA MEMORIES

Actress Jessica Harper remembers Argento's finest 90 minutes…

***Suspiria* is seen as one of best horror films of all time. Did you have any idea of the importance and influence it would have?**
No, I did not [laughs]. What can I say? I was young back then and knew nothing. I did not even know who Dario Argento was.

How did you come to be cast in *Suspiria*?
Dario had seen me in Brian DePalma's *Phantom Of The Paradise*, and he had enjoyed my performance. As far as I recall, that was how I ended up meeting him and how he ended up asking me to be Suzy Bannion in *Suspiria*. Dario was very passionate, and I loved the idea of doing this interesting project in Italy. It was very exciting, and I knew right away I was going to accept the part.

Are the rumours true that he would play the Goblin theme song during rehearsals in order to unnerve the cast members before shooting?
I honestly don't remember, but it certainly makes for a good rumour, doesn't it? [laughs] I don't think anyone was unnerved on the set, though. We were just there to make a creepy horror movie, and the cast got along very well – although I can tell you that the shoot for *Suspiria* was consistently interesting. I loved living in Rome for a short period of time and working with the Italian cast and crew. We also shot some of *Suspiria* in Munich, so I got to travel to Germany for the first time. That was great – all that travel was a big perk of doing the movie with Dario. I am always enthusiastic about getting to know another culture, and *Suspiria* provided that.

What did you think when you first saw Suspiria?
When you are in a movie, the experience of watching it – and yourself – is very odd, never mind something like *Suspiria*! I appreciated *Suspiria* much more when I saw it years afterwards. By that time I was a little bit more objective, and I could look at it with a distance between what it was and the experience of making it. By then, I could see how amazing *Suspiria* really is.

Were you offered roles in any of Dario Argento's other films?
Nope, Dario never came calling again. I did perform in some other horrors after *Suspiria*, but they weren't so good, and let's just say that I don't like talking about them!

"*The Stendhal Syndrome* goes against the rules of the genre a bit," opines Luigi Cozzi. "It is maybe a bit more dramatic and less about who the killer might be. So the anticipation for a new Dario Argento giallo, in the traditional sense, was not met. However, I think *Sleepless* was a better film – especially its opening, when a terrified woman is stalked on a train. I think that is a very strong sequence, and pure Argento. After that point though, the film starts to crumble and tries to be a little bit too much like *Deep Red*, but it never comes close. I think the characters are also a bit too weak, with only Max von Sydow really standing out."

Argento would return to television for *Do You Like Hitchcock?* (2005), a harmless – but also thrill-less – small-screen homage to the *Psycho* filmmaker, and two episodes of the Mick Garris-produced *Masters Of Horror* series. The big news, however, was the conclusion of the surrealist and sublime 'Three Mothers' trilogy that began with *Suspiria* and continued with *Inferno*. In the prologue to *Inferno*, we are forewarned that the most threatening evil of all will come from 'The Mother of Tears', who resides in Rome. As such, when Argento confirmed that we would finally see the final instalment of his beloved franchise, fan excitement reached fever point. Unfortunately, trepidation was felt when Asia was confirmed to be returning to her father's forte and Adam Gierasch and Jace Anderson, writers of Tobe Hooper's *Crocodile* (2000) and *Mortuary* (2005), were announced as the pen-people behind the new adventure.

Was it worth the three-decade wait? Well, no. *Mother Of Tears* (2007) marked a new nadir for Argento. Featuring a title character with large fake mammary glands, a ludicrous depiction of Armageddon, an all-seeing devilish chimpanzee (!) and tedium galore, the director's latest dud was one of the worst genre sequels in history. Most frustratingly, it refuses the eye-wateringly delicious colour palette that made Suspiria so outstanding: in its place is bland, bog-standard sub-SyFy Channel clumsiness.

"The colours, acting and story are very different in *Mother Of Tears*, because I wanted all three episodes to be very unique," defends Argento. "The colour scheme is deliberately cooler in *Mother Of Tears*. It is a film I am glad I finally got to make. After I shot *Inferno*, I started to prepare the third and final episode of my '*Three Mothers*' series. But then I got caught up in the production of two other films, which took about four years, so *Mother Of Tears* got put on hold. It took many years before I started to study books on the occult and witchcraft again and get my enthusiasm back for this subject matter."

For anyone else, *Mother Of Tears* may well have been the final nail in the veritable career coffin. Where once Argento was hailed as one of world cinema's most talented tenants, now he was lacerating his own legacy with what looked like the work of a jobbing amateur. Amazingly, then, his next venture was *Giallo,* starring Oscar winner Adrien Brody – and once again, the hope of a return to form was raised.

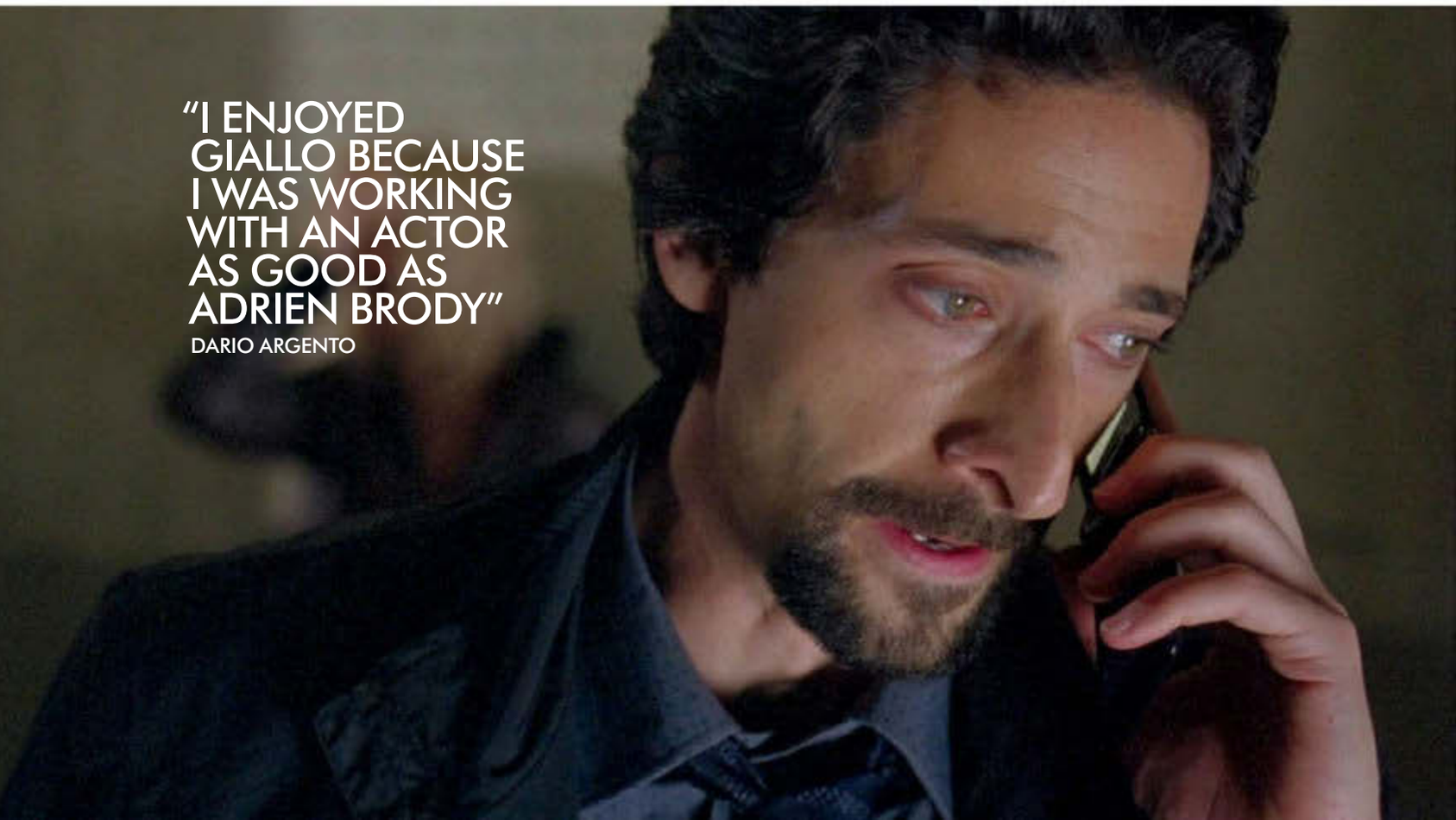
"*Giallo* was the first time in my life that I have had to direct a script that I have had no input into," affirms Argento. "The script was already written, and I was brought in to make the movie. It was a slightly different experience for me. I prefer to write my own scripts, although I do not mind collaborating with others, as



Through all the different eras of horror, the director's iconic status has endured.



Argento's career reached a nadir with the infamously bad *Dracula 3D*.



"I ENJOYED GIALLO BECAUSE I WAS WORKING WITH AN ACTOR AS GOOD AS ADRIEN BRODY"
DARIO ARGENTO

I did on The *Mother Of Tears*. What I do not like is being shut out of the writing process entirely. But *Giallo* was a very interesting shoot. I enjoyed it because I was working with an actor as good as Adrien Brody."

With Brody on double-duty (he portrays a woman-hating murderer, as well as a police detective), *Giallo* turned out to be a different kind of caper to what its moniker suggests. No mystery is involved; instead, Argento – with his now depressingly familiar muddy photography – goes the torture-porn route, with scenes of grimy gore and plenty of abused female victims. Interestingly, though, no amount of spilled blood can stop *Giallo* from turning into a laugh riot. Brody's hysterical performance compliments dialogue that is among cinema's all-time worst, causing plenty of unintentional laughs. Depressingly, then, *Giallo* turned out to be Argento's most entertaining film since *Trauma* – for all the wrong reasons.

"Maybe my work is not so shocking anymore," he says. "The newer horror films that have been coming out in America are very violent – even more violent than my stuff. I think times have changed. I remember when I saw *Hostel*, I thought it was very gruesome, so maybe my films have just become tamer in comparison."

Certainly, if the badly received Giallo couldn't impress his fans, Argento's last project to date also stood little chance. Announced at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, and premiering two years later, *Dracula 3D* rivals *Mother Of Tears* as the former maverick's worst motion picture to date. Starring Rutger Hauer and staging another awful turn from Asia Argento, this loose adaptation attempts to pay homage to the Hammer films of old, but flounders under some terrible digital effects, uneventful storytelling and laughable gimmickry. The low point surely comes when Dracula (played by Thomas Kretschmann) mutates into a badly animated giant grasshopper.

"You have to remember that Dario's success was constructed from the Seventies through to about the mid-Eighties," says Luigi Cozzi, who runs Argento's famous Profondo Rosso shop in Rome. "Each of his films introduced new ideas. Then, in the Nineties, these big ideas, apart from maybe some parts of *The Stendhal Syndrome* and *Sleepless*, became less fresh. But is that Dario's fault? I don't know – I just think he changed cinema so much that there was nowhere else for him to go. He had said all he could say with the giallo and horror."





Unfortunately, the 'Mother Of Tears' trilogy finale couldn't match the likes of *Inferno*.



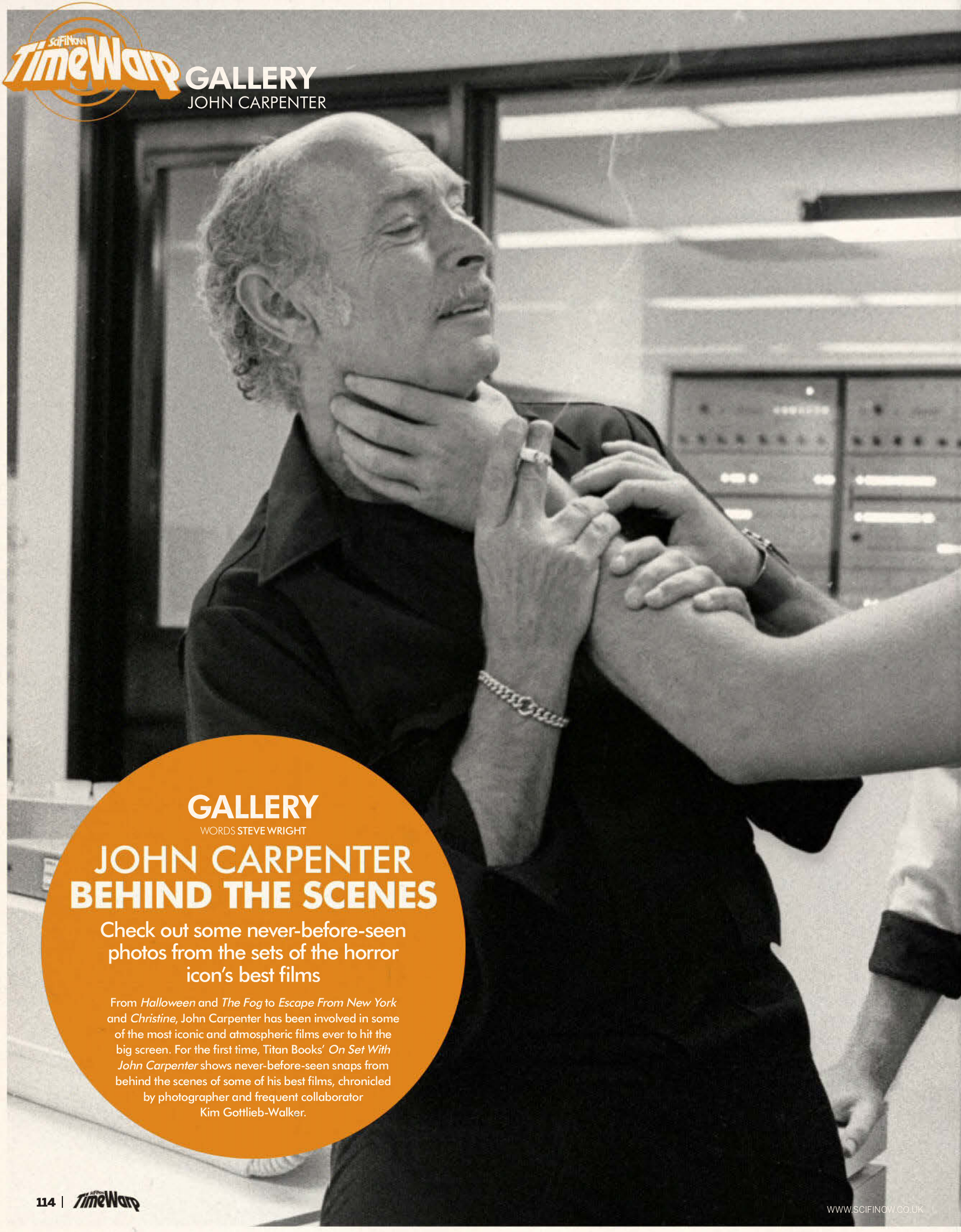
Times may have changed, but the classic status of films like *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* has never been in doubt.

PRODUCED BY DARIO ARGENTO

When the director teamed up with Bava and Fulci

After the success of *Dawn Of The Dead*, Argento spotted an opportunity to lend his name to future productions. His friend Lamberto Bava, who had worked as an assistant director on both *Inferno* and *Tenebrae*, was given the nod for *Demons* (1985), which became an international hit. During the late Eighties, the country's horror tradition was largely seen to rest in the hands of Michele Soavi, another Argento disciple. When Bava opted out of directing *Demons 3*, the script was turned into the dreamy, Argento-produced *The Church* (1989), helmed by Soavi. The end result is one of the last great moments of the Italian horror trend. Argento and Soavi had less success with supernatural shocker *The Sect* (1991), and the latter branched out to make the exemplary *Cemetery Man* (1994) before retiring from the gore-game. A meeting of the two most famous living legends, Argento and Lucio Fulci, was due to take place with *Wax Mask* (1997), but when the *Zombie Flesh-Eaters* creator passed away, the gore-fest was made by effects wizard Sergio Stivaletti instead. Argento remained on board as producer, and would also oversee his daughter Asia's softcore epic of ego-stroking and kit-offery *Scarlet Diva* (2000).





GALLERY

WORDS **STEVE WRIGHT**

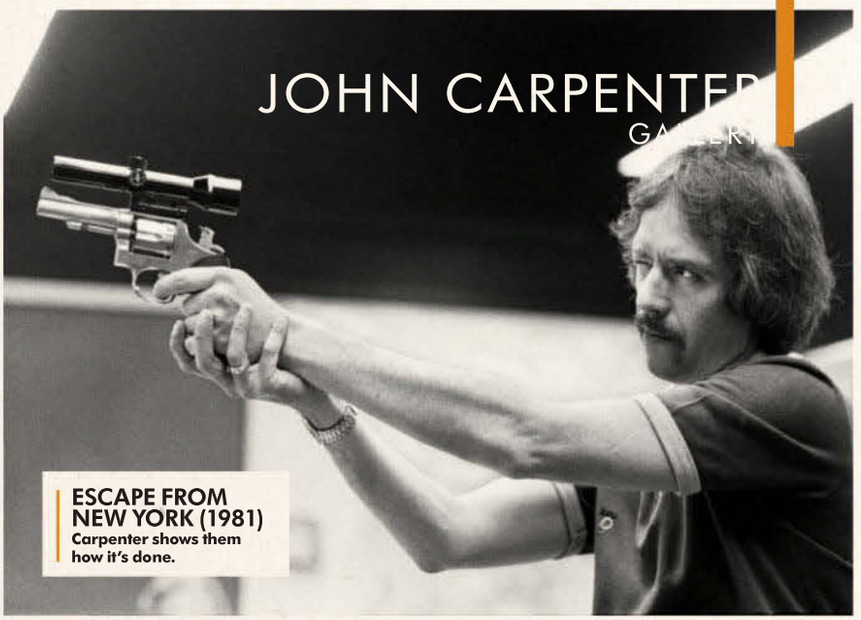
JOHN CARPENTER BEHIND THE SCENES

Check out some never-before-seen photos from the sets of the horror icon's best films

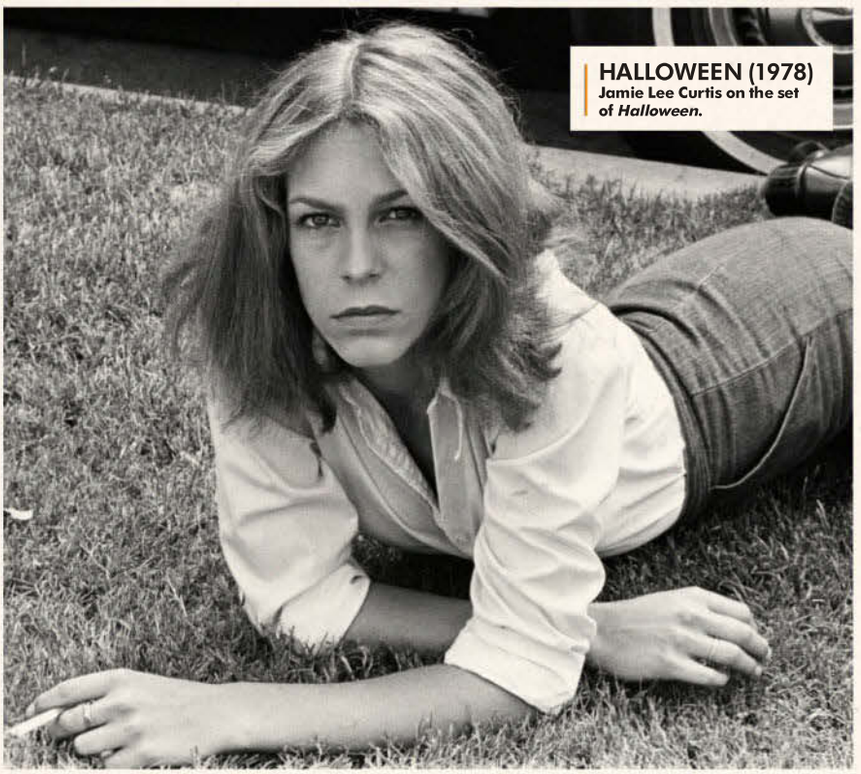
From *Halloween* and *The Fog* to *Escape From New York* and *Christine*, John Carpenter has been involved in some of the most iconic and atmospheric films ever to hit the big screen. For the first time, Titan Books' *On Set With John Carpenter* shows never-before-seen snaps from behind the scenes of some of his best films, chronicled by photographer and frequent collaborator Kim Gottlieb-Walker.



GETTING TO GRIPS
Lee Van Cleef, Kurt Russell and Carl Fischer on the set of *Escape From New York*.



ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK (1981)
Carpenter shows them how it's done.



HALLOWEEN (1978)
Jamie Lee Curtis on the set of *Halloween*.

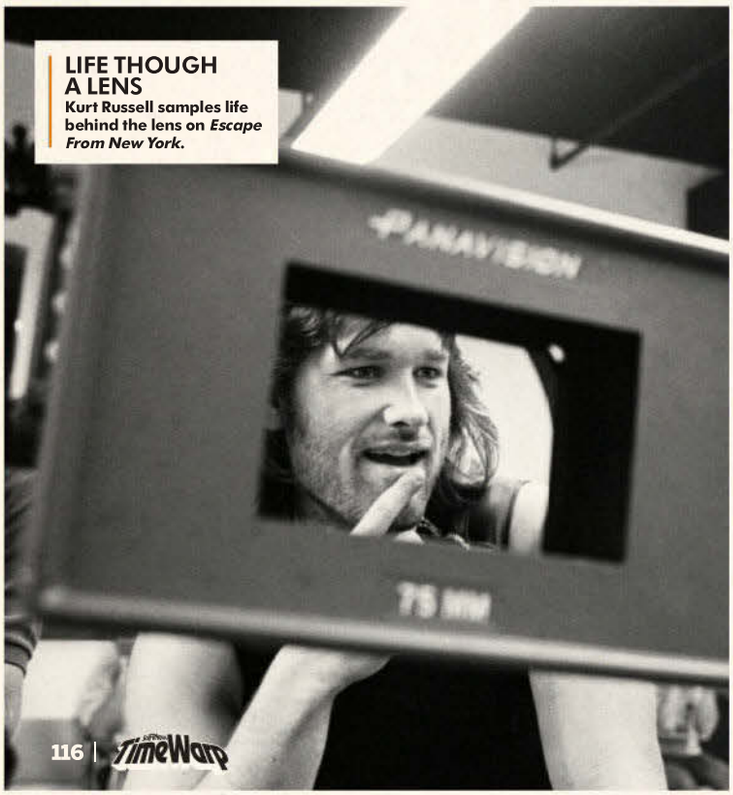


PAINTING NEW YORK
James Cameron working on the skyline to make the Sepulveda Dam into Central Park. "What they didn't realise was that when the helicopter would drop things, they would fall behind the buildings," says Kim Gottlieb-Walker.

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SEEING DOUBLE
Dick Warlock (Kurt's long-time stunt double) with Kurt Russell.

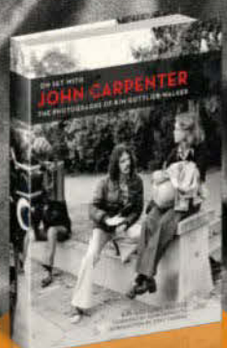


LIFE THOUGH A LENS
Kurt Russell samples life behind the lens on *Escape From New York*.



HALLOWEEN II (1981)
Said stuntman Dick Warlock of this rather alarming shot: "We shot the fire in the hospital scene at Raleigh Studios. I was only partly involved in the fire scene at the end. I hired good safety guys to put me out when I had had enough of the heat. Unfortunately for me, I realised it too late, and got singed a little during that one."

CHILLAXING
Nick Castle suited up as Michael Myers. "Dr Pepper had donated a whole lot of drinks to the set, as long as they could get some shots showing it being used by the cast and crew, which became an assignment for me," reveals Kim Gottlieb-Walker.



On Set With John Carpenter: The Photographs Of Kim Gottlieb-Walker, containing numerous candid photographs of the cast and crew of Carpenter's films both at work and play, is available to buy now, published by Titan Books and priced at £24.99.

IT WAS CONSIDERED A FLOP ON ITS RELEASE, BUT THE LOVE FOR THE ANIMATED FEATURE JUST KEEPS GETTING BIGGER. SCIFINOW LOOKS AT HOW THE IRON GIANT WITH A HEART OF GOLD BECAME A CULT CLASSIC WHILE TRYING NOT TO CRY TOO MUCH…

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

TimeWarp Retro Classic Film

THE IRON GIANT



Film

RUNNING TIME: 86 minutes
RELEASE DATE: 6 August 1999
DIRECTOR: Brad Bird
WRITERS: Tim McCanlies, Ted Hughes
CAST: Eli Marienthal, Christopher McDonald, Jennifer Aniston, Harry Connick Jr, John Mahoney, Vin Diesel

About

It's 1957. A mysterious giant metal man crashes into the Atlantic, giving a pair of fishermen a scare. Back on land in a small town in Maine, a young but precocious boy named Hogarth Hughes stumbles across the giant in a forest. Instead of running screaming, lonely Hogarth stays and talks to it, and the two soon become firm friends. With the help of the local scrap yard owner, Hogarth keeps the giant hidden for fear of the authorities targeting it. But there's only so long they can keep a secret this big, especially when there's a CIA official on their trail, dead set on catching them out.

As far as underrated movies go, Brad Bird's animation *The Iron Giant* is right up there with the best of them. If you haven't seen it, you need to stop reading right now and go and find a copy – not just to avoid spoilers over the next four pages, but because it really is that good.

Animated films don't always do amazingly well at the box office when up against blockbusters, and to be fair, 1999 was a pretty great year for cinema. *The Iron Giant* had the likes of *The Sixth Sense*, *American Beauty*, *The Phantom Menace*, *Toy Story 2* and *The Matrix* to contend with. But its place on the highest-grossing chart for that year (78th, if you were wondering) means *The Iron Giant* can be considered a box-office bomb after it raked in a measly $31 million worldwide.

Director Bird told IGN that it was "a mis-marketing campaign of epic proportions at the hands of Warner Bros." He said that they simply didn't realise what they had on their hands, and he was right.

The first thing you have to understand about *The Iron Giant* is that there wasn't anything like it up to its release, and there hasn't been anything like it since. When put on the spot, the only thing that comes to mind in terms of similarities regarding the characters and plot is *Lilo & Stitch*. But still, they are so, so different. Like the Iron Giant himself, the film is one of a kind.

Its uniqueness isn't what makes it such a good film; it's its heart. *The Iron Giant* has so, so much heart, which spans from the core of the movie: the friendship between Hogarth Hughes and the Giant.

It's 1957, the height of the Cold War. Hogarth (Eli Marienthal) is a lonely but precocious nine-year old living in Maine. His father was an Air Force pilot who died in combat, and his widowed mother works long shifts at the local diner to make ends meet. Often picked on by the bigger kids, Hogarth's only friends are the squirrels, frogs and raccoons he 'rescues' and brings home in cardboard boxes. Then, one night, while out exploring in a forest with a torch strapped to the end of a toy gun for protection, Hogarth comes across a gargantuan metal man – an iron giant from outer space. Instead of running for the hills, he makes friends with the giant, finds him food and teaches him to talk. The rest, as they say, is history.

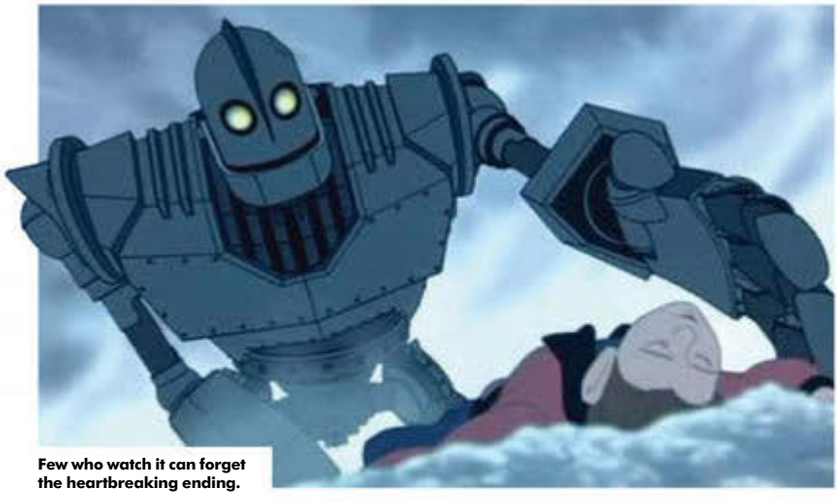
At first, Hogarth is ecstatic at the prospect of having his own pet robot. "This must be the biggest discovery since television or something!" he says. But since he's a carefree kid with no concept of danger, it's not long before he sees the giant as something more than a robot butler. Even though Hogarth is a tiny speck compared to his new friend, he treats the giant like he's something that needs to be protected. He's got its back.

The film doesn't preach as such, but it's filled with values and messages for kids, adults – and indeed, the human race in general. It's about warfare, family and friendship. But mainly, it's about acceptance; accepting who you are, accepting other people, accepting the world as it is. In the words of Hogarth's other new friend, beatnik scrap metal artist Dean McCoppin (Henry Connick Jr): "Who cares what these creeps think of you? They don't make you what you are; you do. You are who you choose to be."

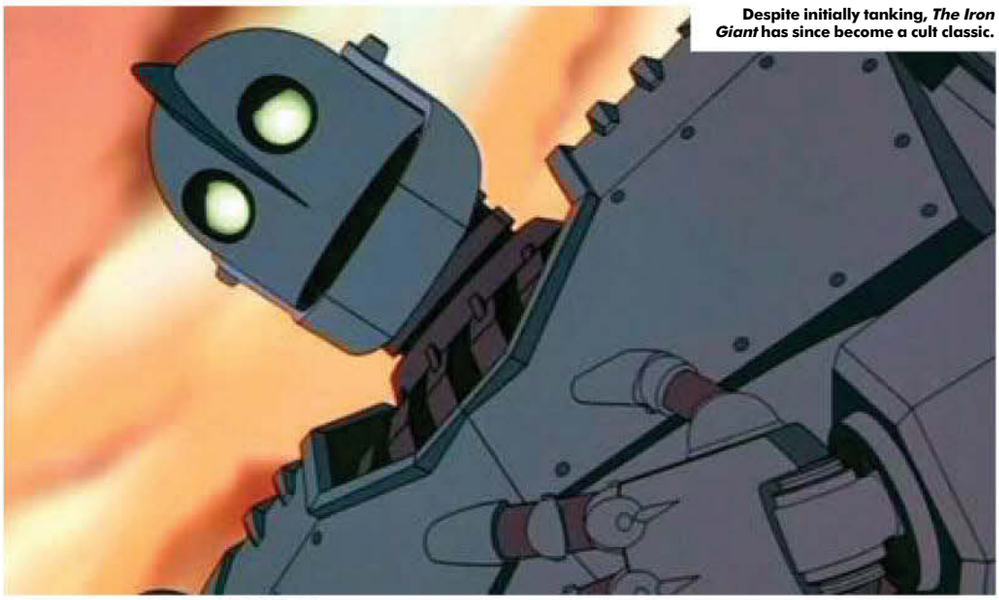
The story for the film came from English poet Ted Hughes' novel *The Iron Man* (not to be confused with the less cool and less definite *Iron Man*). The novel's plot was similar: boy meets giant metal man, giant metal man meets boy, giant metal man saves the planet from annihilation. But there are also major differences. In the novel, the giant appears in the English countryside from apparently nowhere, and is quickly accepted as a member of the community. He promises not to cause trouble for the locals as long as the locals don't cause trouble for him.

One of the things that makes *The Iron Giant* hit so close to home is that throughout most of the movie, the giant

"THEY DON'T MAKE YOU WHAT YOU ARE; YOU DO" HOGARTH



Few who watch it can forget the heartbreaking ending.



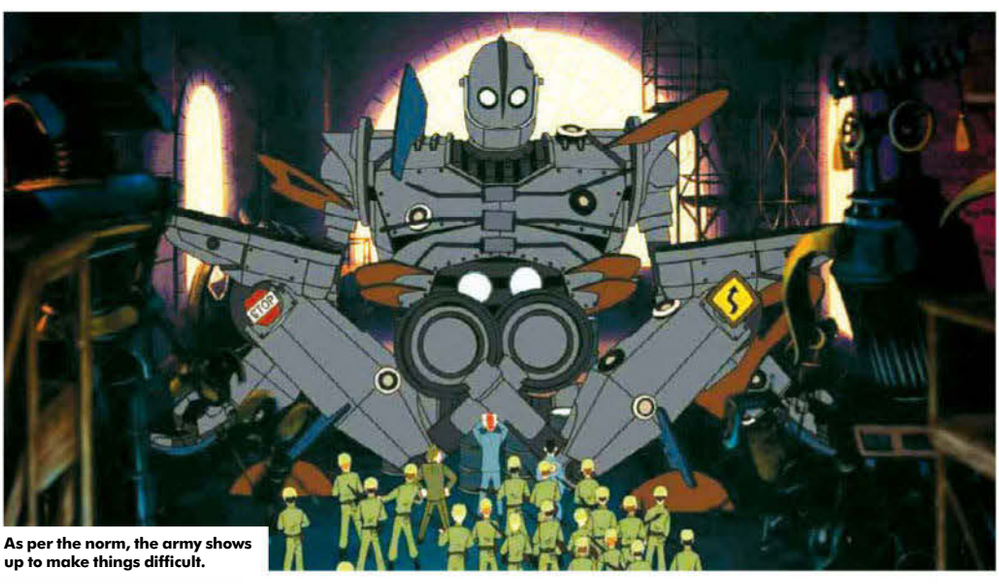
Despite initially tanking, *The Iron Giant* has since become a cult classic.



Uitimately, the lesson at its core is one of anti-violence.



Hogarth's surname was taken from the author of the source material, Ted Hughes.



As per the norm, the army shows up to make things difficult.

CLASSIC QUOTES

"IT'S BAD TO KILL. GUNS KILL. AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A GUN. YOU ARE WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO BE. YOU CHOOSE"
HOGARTH HUGHES

"I AM NOT A GUN"
THE IRON GIANT

"WELCOME TO DOWNTOWN COOLSVILLE! POPULATION: US"
HOGARTH HUGHES

"SOULS DON'T DIE"
THE IRON GIANT

"THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF METAL IN THIS YARD: SCRAP AND ART. IF YOU GOTTA EAT ONE OF THEM, EAT THE SCRAP. WHAT YOU CURRENTLY HAVE – IN YOUR MOUTH – IS ART!"
DEAN MCCOPPIN

"NO ATOMO... I SUPERMAN"
THE IRON GIANT

"YOU REALISE HOW MUCH HARDWARE I BROUGHT OUT HERE? YOU JUST BLEW MILLIONS OF UNCLE SAM'S DOLLARS OUT OF YOUR BUTT!"
GENERAL ROGARD

"SCREW OUR COUNTRY! I WANT TO LIVE!"
KENT MANSLEY

"THIS IS ESPRESSO, YOU KNOW? IT'S LIKE COFFEE-ZILLA"
DEAN MCCOPPIN

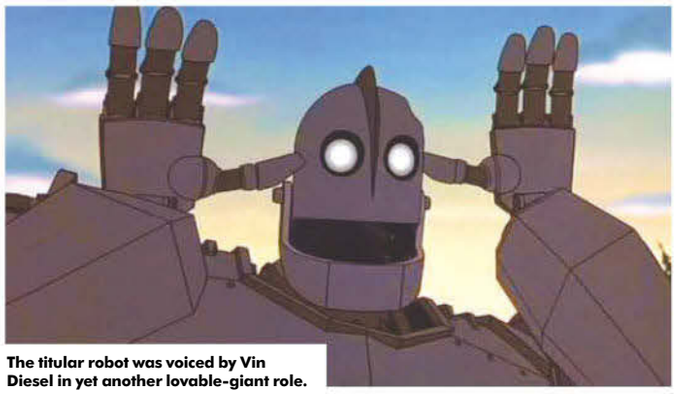
"FOR SOME REASON, THE ARMY IS PARKED IN OUR FRONT YARD"
ANNIE HUGHES

never experiences kindness from anyone but Hogarth, and later, Dean. Sure, he doesn't really meet anyone else for a long while, but that's because Hogarth knows that if anyone found out about his big metal friend hauled up in the woods, the army would crack out the heavy artillery and smite him faster than you can say 'Coco-lax'. As soon as the giant comes into contact with humans that aren't Hogarth or Dean, he has a guided missile locked onto his coordinates. It's enough to make your heart weep. Before anyone can even consider accepting him at all, he has to prove his goodness by sacrificing himself, just because he's too different and bizarre for the tiny humans to even begin to understand. It makes you think: are giant metal men from outer space the monsters here, or are we? It's pretty heavy stuff for an animated kids' film.

The novel's ending is also pretty different to the film, and a lot less heartbreaking. In Hughes' story, the giant ends up playing a game of chicken of sorts with a space-bat-angel-dragon creature that lands in Australia and is set on destroying Earth. The giant wins of course, saving humanity and achieving world peace in the process. The film, on the other hand, sees the giant flying up into space and squaring up to an atom bomb and breaking apart, but not before Hogarth can get in a tear-jerking "I love you".

In Bird's original storyboard, the film ended almost immediately after the giant's death. Screenwriter Tim McCanlies (who went on to be a writer on *Smallville*), thought that was too depressing, and for good reason. "You can't kill ET and then not bring him back," he said, and re-wrote the final act. This decision resulted in what is arguably the best scene of the entire movie: those final moments when dismembered parts read the sonar signal emitted from the giant's head and put themselves back together on a desolate Icelandic glacier.

When you've never seen it before, and you don't know it's coming, that final scene induces the best feeling ever. The music swells and your heart fills back up with the same joy it felt when the genie was



The titular robot was voiced by Vin Diesel in yet another lovable-giant role.



Harry Connick Jr voices Hogarth's friend Dean.



Despite his intimidating appearance, the Giant is a gentle soul.

BIG FRIENDLY GIANTS

Some are hairy, some are gloomy, some are made of wood

1 GROOT
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY (2014)



He may be a thug and a contract killer, but he's the sweetest thug/contract killer you could ever wish to meet. Left with the sight of a tiny version of him dancing, you'll never be the same again. We are Groot.

2 FEZZIK
THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1987)



Gentle, dim-witted Fezzik has twice the giant credentials because he's played by the late great André the Giant. There isn't anything not to love about Fezzik as he helps Westley reunite with Buttercup before she is married.

3 LURCH
THE ADDAMS FAMILY (1964)



He's shambling and gloomy, but the Addams' manservant takes pride in his work and helps out wherever he can. He adds to the dynamic of the family and the films in general.



The Giant is the latest in a line of misunderstood goliaths.



It's unlikely that we'll see anything like *The Iron Giant* again.

freed at the end of *Aladdin*, or when Sully finally saw Boo one last time at the end of *Monsters Inc*. It's worth watching for that one moment.

Bird had set out with a story based around one main idea: 'What if a gun had a soul?' It was a solid idea backed up by an equally solid storyboard, and Bird got a fair bit of freedom, thanks to the trouble Warner Bros had with their previous animation, *Quest For Camelot*. The film was a nightmare with both costs and production, and made the company think about their commitment to future animations. In 2003, McCanlies said: "*Quest For Camelot* did so badly that everybody backed away from animation and fired people. Suddenly, we had no executive on *Iron Giant*, which was great, because Brad got to make his movie. Because nobody was watching." Bird described the film's situation as having "one-third of the money of a Disney or DreamWorks film, and half of the production schedule." The result was having the freedom to do more or less whatever he wanted.

When it came to animating – a mixture of traditional animation and computer animation techniques – the animators soon found that it was extremely difficult trying to draw the metal protagonist in a fluid-like manner. Whatever they did, it was probably witchcraft. The fact that



The dynamic between Hogarth and the Giant is one of the best things about the movie.

the giant – a metal-faced man – seems to communicate more compassion, vulnerability and even humanity than most of the humans is a huge feat in itself. Somehow, the animators managed create a million expressions by only moving the giant's eyes and lower jaw. They gave a lump of metal a soul.

The Iron Giant may have got off to a shaky start, but it has managed to become a crowd-pleasing cult classic, and it's easy to see why. It doesn't matter how old you are, if you're a 30-something who grew up with hand-drawn animation or a kid whose never even seen *The Lion King*. If you have a heart, you'll fall in love with *The Iron Giant*. If you don't, you're probably a robot.



The Iron Giant is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.

WATCH FIRST



ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982)

A lonely boy befriends an alien stranded on Earth, but things turn sour when the alien falls ill.

WATCH NEXT



THE INCREDIBLES (2004)

Brad Bird's second sci-fi animation about a family of superheroes is smart, funny and oh-so cool.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"One of the best films of all time… but where is the Blu-ray edition, eh?" **@HokusBloke**



"It was a really nice surprise for me. I saw it almost by chance on TV; never paid attention to it until then, but it impressed me." **@Scullywen**



"I saw it for the first time last year, and immediately made my whole family watch it. After I had stopped crying." **@dametokillfor**

"We talk about the music all the time! It's brilliant." **@filmsonwax**



"I love *The Iron Giant*. It's well made and a great movie. Also, without 'Rock' would we have got such a good 'I am Groot'?" **@solarstarchild**



"Loved it. I cried, but don't tell!" **@TheCrowLady**



"I like the Iron Giant. It's one of the best sci-fi films of the 90s, and Vin Diesel gave him the same heart as Groot." **@Jbarnes532**

HAGRID
HARRY POTTER (2001)



4 Half giant, half wizard, Rubeus Hagrid is keeper of the keys and grounds of Hogwarts, as well as the keys to our hearts, Harry's confidant, guardian and general lovely half-giant.

THE BFG
THE BFG (1989)



5 This list wouldn't be complete without Roald Dahl's original big friendly giant and whizzpopping king, the BFG himself. He's much nicer than the Maidmasher and the Fleshlumpeater.

LORI THOUGHT SHE KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT HER BOYFRIEND...



LORI WAS WRONG!

NIGHTBREED

FROM CLIVE BARKER, THE CREATOR OF HELLRAISER.

JAMES G. ROBINSON AND JOE ROTH PRESENT A MORGAN CREEK PRODUCTION OF CLIVE BARKER'S NIGHTBREED CRAIG SHEFFER ANNE BOBBY DAVID CRONENBERG
CHARLES HAID MUSIC BY DANNY ELFMAN SPECIAL MAKE-UP AND VISUAL EFFECTS IMAGE ANIMATION SOUND DESIGN BY BRUCE NYZNIK EDITED BY RICHARD MARDEN AND MARK GOLDBLATT
PRODUCTION DESIGNER STEVE HARDIE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ROBIN VIDGEON B.S.C. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JAMES G. ROBINSON AND JOE ROTH SCREENPLAY BY CLIVE BARKER BASED ON HIS NOVEL "CABAL"

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FLASHBACK

NIGHTBREED

IMAGE ANIMATION'S FORMER TEAM REMEMBERS THE MAKING OF CLIVE BARKER'S NIGHTBREED

WORDS **JOE NAZZARO**

It has long been considered a holy grail of modern horror filmmaking, but the original director's cut of Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* has pretty much become a cinematic urban myth. The remnants of Barker's original two and a half-hour version were dumbed down into a 100-minute big-screen release, the extra bits discarded and lost over time, never to be seen again. Or so it seemed.

This situation has changed in recent years, thanks first to the reassembled 'Cabal Cut' of 2010 (cobbled together from Barker's own aging VHS tapes) and now the fully restored *Nightbreed* director's cut from Morgan Creek and Shout/Scream Factory. The latter edition uses nearly 45 minutes of 'lost' footage to create a version of the film that is as close to the director's original vision as possible as you could get at the point in time.

Perhaps the most exciting news about the director's cut is that it features a huge number of monsters excised from the 1990 version, and only seen in photographs or magazine articles. This is very good news indeed for the former team at Image Animation, who created hundreds of creatures of every size, shape and description, only to see many of them exiled to the cutting room floor.

Formed in the mid-Eighties by creature effects artist Bob Keen, Image Animation was a company unlike any seen before or since in the UK. The average age of the crew members was 19 or 20, most with virtually no experience to speak of, but they were there because they wanted to make monsters. In an industry dominated by a small handful of veterans, Image was an unfocused shot of adrenaline.

"Nick Dudman used to call us 'schoolboys rolled in flour', because we were all extremely young and we were all filthy," remembers Paul Jones, who came down to London from Shrewsbury at the age of 19 to work on a commercial with Keen. "There was definitely a frathouse mentality there; if you ask anybody about the games of flaming frisbee or the water fights, you would wonder how any work got done. The simple answer is nobody ever left. During *Nightbreed*, people stayed 24/7. Guys used to sleep at the shop.

"I remember Paul Spateri spending four days at the shop; he just went to sleep underneath his bench on a piece of foam, and then woke up again and carried on working. I had never lived away from home; the workshop was my home. We didn't have a social life that wasn't workshop-orientated, so when a job ended we would just stay there and do our own projects."

"It was certainly a magnet," agrees Steve Painter. "I was 20 when I started working there, and we were all more or less in the same age group, so we all became mates, and are to this day. I was just happy to be in the company of other people that had the same interests as me. When I was at secondary school, I was the odd one out, and suddenly I was surrounded by people who were into the same things I was into."

In some ways, the careers of Barker and Image were inexorably linked in the mid-Eighties, beginning with *Hellraiser*, where the young filmmaker found a group of kindred spirits that could bring his off-kilter vision to life. "Clive was a dream to work with," remembers Keen, "because it was like mental ping-pong. He would hit an idea to you, and you would hit it back, so you would keep battling those ideas around."

The unexpected success of *Hellraiser* turned Barker into a filmmaker to be reckoned with, and the 'team of schoolboys rolled in flour' suddenly became household names. It wasn't long before they started creating their next project together, which would be based on Barker's novella, *Cabal*.

Nightbreed was an audacious idea – a monster movie in which the sympathetic inhabitants of Midian were the monsters themselves. And these creatures would be unlike any seen in film before. For several weeks, the Image team experimented with all manner of approaches to their characters. "We tried everything," Geoff Portass confirms. "We would bring people in, strip them off, glue them all over, cover them

"PEOPLE WONDER HOW ANY WORK GOT DONE. THE SIMPLE ANSWER IS THAT NOBODY LEFT"

PAUL JONES



Actor Craig Sheffer in full Cabal mode, with make-up artist John 'Little John' Cormican.

with white polystyrene balls and spray-paint them. It never got used, but it was fascinating to create the effect of all these 'eyes' poking up.

"I did one character that is briefly seen in the film, where I put somebody in an enormous body sock and covered it with little bits of foam and skeletal ribs, so this giant slug-like creature would crawl around, pulling itself along by its legs. We would use pieces from other movies, or find stuff in bins, because Clive wanted to populate this place with so many different characters."

"When filming finally started," recalls Painter, "we would turn up in the morning and Geoff would have a bin liner full of prosthetic pieces. We weren't allowed to look at them; we would put our arms in and whatever we picked out had to be put on a student actor. Every background character was more or less improvised on the day."

In sharp contrast to most creature films, where a character was built by a small army of artists and technicians, members of the *Nightbreed* crew were often given a character to take from initial design to final make-up application. "From my own experience and reading about the American way of doing things," notes Portass, "there would be a sculptor, a painter and an applier. On this film, Simon Sayce did Peloquin, Neill Gorton did Narcisse, I did Baphomet, Little John did Boone, etc. I think that allows you to take your time and grow with the characters, whereas if you've got somebody sculpting something and they think it's going to be taken from their hands and given to somebody else to be detailed and applied, they don't necessarily put as much heart into it."

The prospect of designing and building a character could be quite daunting for some of the relatively inexperienced young crew. "I knew I was going to be doing Boone," remembers John 'Little John' Cormican, "and was quite worried about it at that point. The make-up was done by me and Chris Halls – now a famous director named Chris Cunningham – but he was a teenager then, and we went through hell together.

"Every day, we would get up, do some very precise and tricky things to somebody's face, take it off at the end of a very long day, drop Chris off, go home, get a few hours of sleep, and do it all over again the next day. I remember sitting in the make-up room waiting for Craig Sheffer to arrive, and kind of hoping he wouldn't turn up that day. When I think about it now, I was way out of my depth!"

That feeling was definitely shared by a number of Cormican's compatriots, many of who had plenty of enthusiasm but relatively little experience. "What we were was a bunch of low-budget chancers," concedes Gorton, who would found Millennium FX 15 years later. "There were a lot of people who would become real talents, but at the time, we were a bunch of kids with very little technical knowledge, who were being paid appallingly.

"At age 18 I was a runner, and by the time I was 19 I was doing lead characters on *Nightbreed*. It really was a bizarre mix of over-enthusiasm and slave labour; it's a miracle that anything came of it. You were just handed something to do, and you had to do it. That gave me massive opportunities that I wouldn't have got anywhere else, but by default, really."

"I think my biggest jump within the company was on *Nightbreed*," claims Jones. "I had essentially been hired as a painter and construction guy, but I really wanted to get into animatronics, so I asked Bob if I could borrow some mechanical stuff from the storage bins, and went home one weekend and created an animatronic head. I brought it in on Monday and showed it to Bob, who said, 'We have these characters called the Berserkers, and I'm going to give them to you!' so that was a huge undertaking, because I had never built a creature suit in my life!"

Not only did the Image team have to create an army of creatures; they often had to play them as well. Jones had to put on a sweat-soaked Berserker suit himself after Barker decided he needed another shot. "We didn't even have time to disinfect the suits!" he recalls with disgust. "I was also in a flashback sequence of some characters getting tortured during the Inquisition, so you see a werewolf tied up on a big cross, and that was me. The reason I was in that suit was because nobody wanted to wear it. It had to be glued to my body, so Neill went to great pains to make sure every one of my armpit hairs had glue on it. I couldn't get rid of the glue for weeks afterwards."



A then-teenage Chris Halls checks a wound on Sheffer.



Robbie Drake was pressed into service as a creature that was literally stuck to the floor and covered in slime. Harrison played a dog-man who gets shot in the neck, although his appearance was relegated to the making-of book. Paul Spateri, who painted the Decker masks for David Cronenberg's character, got to stand in for the director-turned actor in one scene in which his stunt double was significantly worse for the wear. And Cormican got to play a blue-skinned hermaphrodite complete with prosthetic breasts. "They were originally made for an Eighties pop star," he explains, "for a movie in which his character was a hermaphrodite, and they were just a test, because he didn't get his movie in the end. I think it was Clive who suggested, 'Let's get John in them and in front of the camera!' but I was really proud of those breasts."

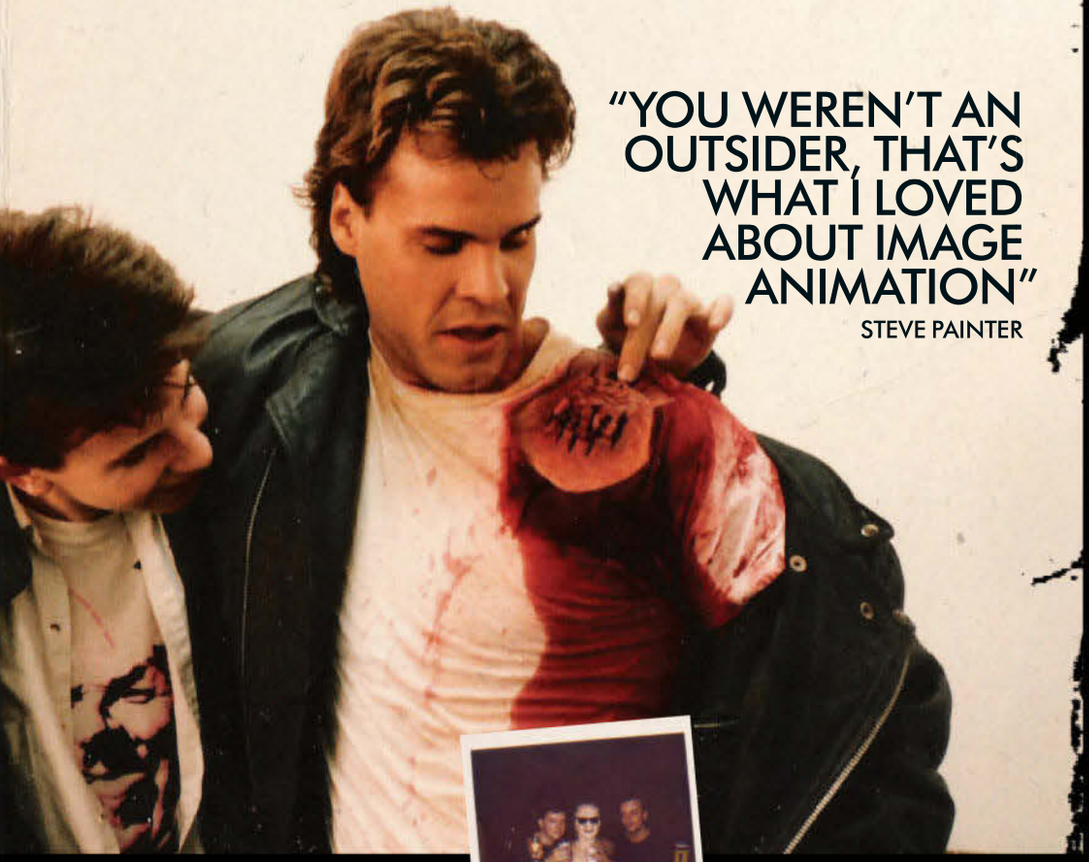
While Barker and the Image team were putting some amazing images on film, it was becoming obvious that the director's vision was not what the studio had in mind. Barker wanted to create a story in which the audience could relate to and sympathise with the monsters, but the powers-that-be were looking for a run-of-the-mill slasher film. "We were within weeks of wrapping," remembers Keen, "and at that point, it was the best movie I had ever worked on. And then we came back here and did maybe six weeks more shooting, and



(Top left) A life cast of Sheffer used to sculpt Boone's make-up; (Above) Frick, one of the background extras.



Vasty Moses, suit by Little John, make-up by Chris Halls.



"YOU WEREN'T AN OUTSIDER, THAT'S WHAT I LOVED ABOUT IMAGE ANIMATION"
STEVE PAINTER





then they went to LA for another three or four weeks shooting, and then they did more."

"I remember coming to the end of the original shoot and saying, 'If I hear the names Boone or Lori ever again, it will be too soon!" continues Jones, "because *Nightbreed* was like a year from when we first started to when we finished. What happened with the reshoots was Clive basically came in and said, 'We need some characters I can feature, and we need them now!' so we were off and running again.

"I don't think that was the right decision," counters Portass, "because I felt we started to get into corny catchphrases, which was the Hollywood influence of making it more palatable to the lowest common denominator. When they brought David Cronenberg back for the reshoots, his hair had grown, so you watch the movie and think, 'Come on!' They also pushed the psychotic angle a bit too much. Clive's original cut had been far more about this monster society, so I think we needed to see more of those little vignettes that really would have worked."

With *Nightbreed: The Director's Cut* finally seeing the light of day, there is a sense of vindication for the Image Animation team, but it has taken a quarter of a century to finally arrive at that point. "I think it was very intimidating for Bob and Geoff when they were given *Nightbreed*," reflects Jones, "just because of the amount of stuff we had to create, and I feel the movie suffered for that, because it was difficult to focus on one particular thing. We had animatronic creatures, stop-motion creatures, subtle make-ups, elaborate make-ups; we did the entire spectrum for that movie, so it's what happens if you put every colour of paint on a canvas. There has to be a focal point, and to my mind I don't think *Nightbreed* had one."

"I loved being at Image," adds Painter. "To this day, I count those days as my happiest time, and I don't think I've had fun since, not to that degree. We were being paid to do our hobby, and getting to work with guys who were on the same wavelength. You weren't an outsider, so that's what I loved about Image Animation. I miss it."

Clive Barker with the Image Animation team, many of them still in make-up as extras in the film.



THE LEGEND OF GREYSTOKE

HOW THE NIGHTBREED CREW LITERALLY RAIDED THE SKIPS OF THE EIGHTIES APE MOVIE

With so many creatures to build, Keen and his crew were not above occasionally raiding a skip for raw materials, but there was one incident in particular that quite literally changed the look of the film. "What happened was Warners had thrown away all the apes from *Greystoke* in a skip," explains Harrison, "so we took them all back to the workshop."

"Everything had been dumped," continues Gorton. "All the suits, everything. It was the most shocking thing I've ever seen, and it just happened to be the skip right outside Image Animation, so if you look closely, half of the creatures in *Nightbreed* are made out of chimp asses! There were boxes of them, and they all had this slightly weird-looking shape, so it was amazing, the number of things that got built out of chimp asses."

"There's one character in the film with snakes coming out of his chest," claims Harrison, "and that chest is a *Greystoke* stomach. At one point there is a creature lying dead on the floor, and that body is a *Greystoke* ape. There are even tombstones with ape heads on them."

"There's also the autopsy chimp that was now in our workshop," says Gorton, "so there we were, all these snotty-nosed kids who thought we knew what they were doing, and then you look at this piece and you're in shock at the quality of it. And you're in even worse show when Bob starts stripping the fur off it, gluing something over the face, painting it purple and dragging it on set. You can't believe what just happened to this iconic movie prop, thinking, 'Oh God, make it stop!'"

"I did save some fibreglass heads," notes Harrison, "and I think Chris Halls took one of the close-up cable-controlled mechanical heads. There was also a film we later did called *Chimera* that Little John supervised, and Bob got that job because he took one of the Carla animatronic heads to a meeting and said, 'This is what we can do for *Chimera*!'"



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WELCOME TO TWIN PEAKS

1. Who is the first to find Laura Palmer's body in the pilot episode?
2. Who are Sheriff Harry Truman's two deputies?
3. What colour is The Man From Another Place's suit?
4. Who does Special Agent Dale Cooper record voice notes for throughout the series?
5. Which high-school student has a crush on Cooper?

POPULATION: 51,201

6. What is the name of the town's brothel-slash-casino?
7. Where does Shelley Johnson work as a waitress?
8. Where did Laura's psychiatrist Dr Lawrence Jacoby grow up?
9. What is the name of the hotel owned by Benjamin Horne?
10. What is the name of the neglected bungalow located outside the town?

ENJOY YOUR STAY

11. What is the name of Laura Palmer's doppelganger cousin, also played by Sheryl Lee?
12. What is the Log Lady's real name?
13. Which musician plays Phillip Jeffries in the spin-off movie *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*?
14. What is the name of the myna bird that was shot in episode six?
15. What religion does Special Agent Cooper practice?

THE FOURTH PEAK

16. What date did the first episode air?
17. Who composed the show's opening music?
18. What is the real name of the waterfall featured in the show's external shots?
19. What was the show's working title?
20. What is the subtitle of the tie-in novel *The Autobiography of FBI. Special Agent Dale Cooper*, published in 1999?

DIDN'T HE/SHE DO WELL! See how you did with our arbitrary scoring system



16-20
SPECIAL AGENT DALE COOPER
After a morning coffee and a slice of cherry pie, you are pretty much invincible. You've not been in Twin Peaks long, but you already know the town like the back of your hand.

11-15
THE LOG LADY
A lot of people don't understand you, but you understand your clairvoyant log, and that's all the matters. The log's predictions often come down to nothing, but a little thing like that won't stop you.

6-10
BOBBY BRIGGS
You come across as mean, annoying and weird. You need to grow up for people to take you seriously. Hold back on the barking and outbursts – it's this behaviour that makes you bad at quizzes.

0-5
LAURA PALMER
You may be a central character, but turning up dead at the start of the pilot is kind of lame. Your murder has been your downfall in more ways that one. Your rep has been damaged forever.

ANSWERS: 1. PETE MARTELL **2.** ANDY BRENNAN AND TOMMY 'HAWK' HILL **3.** RED **4.** DIANE **5.** AUDREY HORNE **6.** ONE EYED JACKS **7.** THE DOUBLE R DINER **8.** HAWAII **9.** GREAT NORTHERN HOTEL **10.** DEAD DOG FARM **11.** MADELEINE 'MADDY' FERGUSON **12.** MARGARET LANTERMAN **13.** DAVID BOWIE **14.** WALDO **15.** BUDDHISM **16.** 8 APRIL 1990 **17.** ANGELO BADALAMENTI **18.** SNOQUALMIE FALLS **19.** NORTHWEST PASSAGE **20.** MY LIFE, MY TAPES

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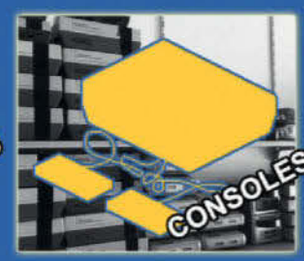












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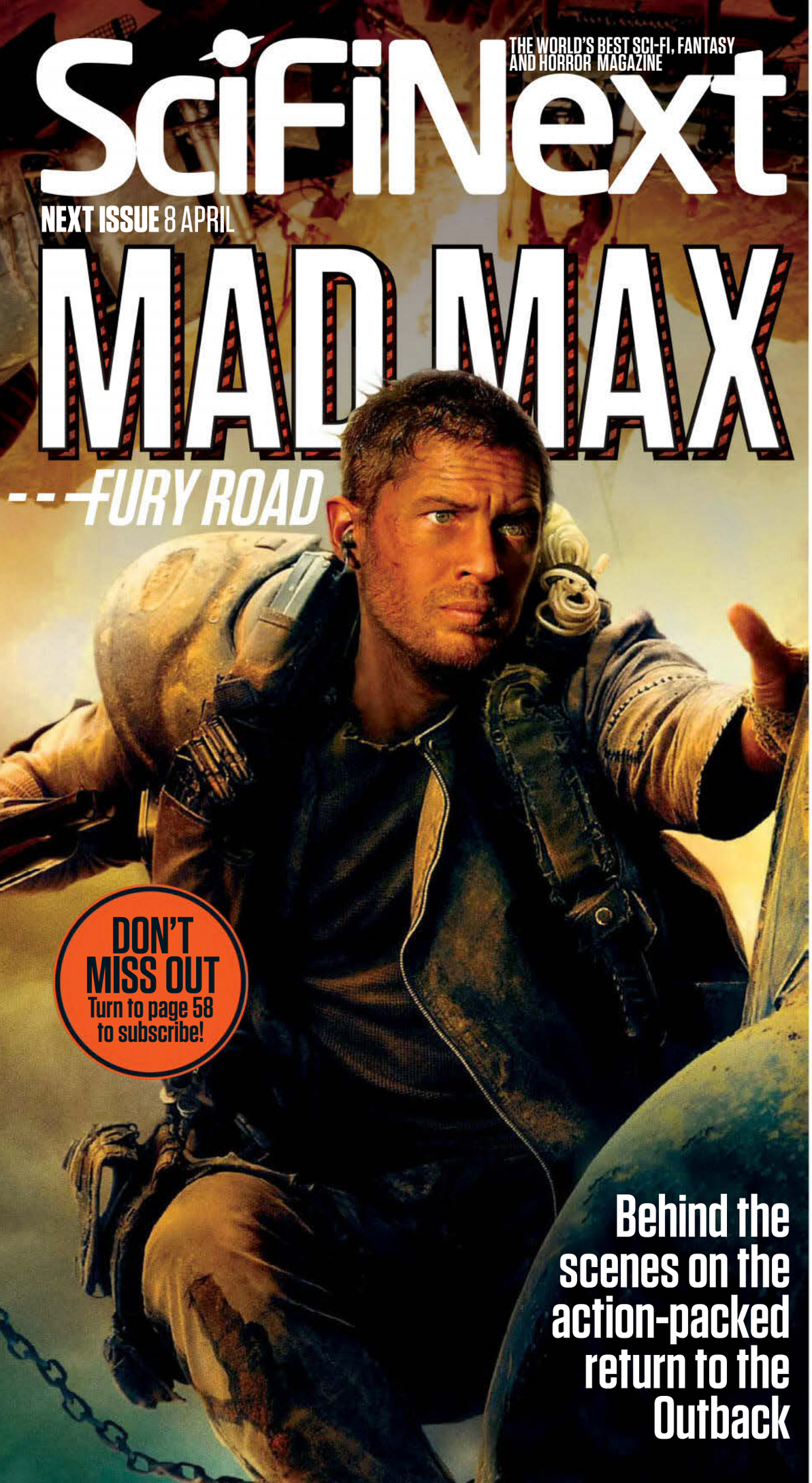


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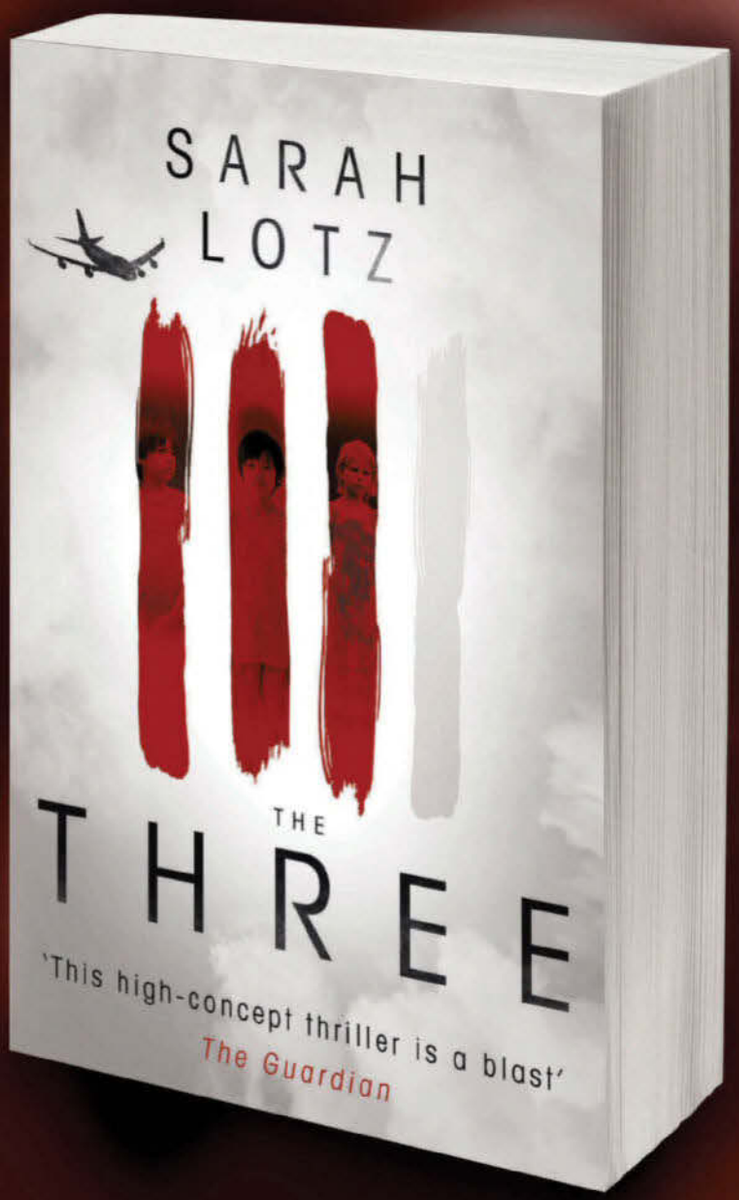
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